

“PEOPLE OF THE JUNGLE”

Adat, Women and Change among Orang Rimba

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Abstract

In a small national park in the Jambi province of Sumatra, Indonesia lives Orang Rimba. A group of matrilineal, animist, hunter-gather and occasional swidden cultivating forest dwellers. They call themselves, Orang Rimba, which translates to 'People of the Jungle', indicating their dependency and their connectedness with the forest. Over the past decades the Sumatran rainforest have diminished drastically. The homes of thousands of forest dwellers have been devastated and replaced by monoculture oil palm plantations that push Orang Rimba away from their customary land. Development projects, national and international governments, the Non-Governmental Organisation KKI Warsi through initiatives such as Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD) seek to conserve forests and 'develop peoples'. In the middle of all this Orang Rimba are struggling to keep their eminence as a group who define themselves in contrast to 'others', people of the 'outside'. The core question this thesis asks is how physical changes in the environment have affected Orang Rimba of Bukit Duabelas and their perceptions of the world. It answers the question by going through Orang Rimba 'now and then', drawing mainly on the works of Steven Sager (2008) and Øyvind Sandbukt (1984, 1988, 2000 and in conversation) as well as other comparable literature to compare. It proves that Orang Rimba have moved from being a group almost completely isolated from the world outside the forest to a group in nearly daily contact with 'the outside' dependent on foods, trading partners and the monetary economy represented by the outside. Their significant *adat* customary system however, reveals that women play a significant role in Orang Rimba's success not to assimilate into major society. Simultaneously, their traditional practices are daily challenged by outside influences. This thesis goes through the changes and challenges, and adjustments Orang Rimba face in a world that is physically changing through deforestation, and socially changing through increased interaction with 'others'. It concludes that despite changes, Orang Rimba have managed to keep their sense of belonging in the forest, where the majority have interest in keeping it intact.

Keywords: Matrilineality, deforestation, animism, forest-dwellers, customs, spirituality, onto-praxis, cosmology, perception, belonging, separation, boundaries, change.

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Finally thanks to those who inspired me to go through with this project: The Anthropologists before me, and my mother and sister for always supporting all my choices in life. To everyone at the department of anthropology both in Yogyakarta and University of Oslo, fellow students and colleagues, thank you for encouragement, sharing experiences, worries and countless coffees.

Anne Erita Venåsen Berta,

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1

Changing environments and the people in them

Orang Rimba perceptions of the world

«I stumble along the slippery, narrow path as I try to keep up with my companions. It is too early in the day for the sun to have dried up the ground after a night of rain. I concentrate to hold on to my flip-flops with my toes as the muddy ground attempts to absorb them. The crowd of young men and boys are barefoot or just more skilled than me, and they do not even slip as we walk down the steep hill to the tree we are heading for. Our mission is Benton; a fruit I was told is exclusive to Bukit Duabelas. At the bottom of the hill, we have to cross a small river before we arrive at the tree. I admit defeat and get rid of the annoying flip-flops before entering the muddy soil that forms the river floor. Everyone but me is unaffected by the mud, dirt and slipperiness of the landscape. They agree that Adik will climb the tree. I am still trying to cross the river. He climbs the tree and most of the others climb another tree – just for fun. Me, being the only one on the ground, Adik continuously orders me to move here and there to avoid getting a branch in my head. I understand why the others climbed that other tree.

After a while of cutting loose large branches from the Benton tree, Adik climbs down and we all work together to gather the fruits and fill them in a large backpack. As we work and struggle to bring down one of the branches that is stuck on a smaller tree, I wonder how anyone could describe Orang Rimba as being concerned about protecting the forest. I have just witnessed a young man cutting several meters long branches of a valuable fruit tree just to get the fruits that grow on them. How long will it take the branches to grow back to that size? Will they ever grow back? How will next years' harvest from this tree be, when we have cut off many of its branches? Disappointed and a bit worried I walk back to the camp where eager friends are waiting to cook and eat the goods we bring.» (Excerpts from field notes March 2013)

The '*Benton*' story is just one of many incidents that I interpreted as ignorance of the value of the forest, while simultaneously acknowledging Orang Rimba's excellent skills. Before going to the field, I had heard somewhere that Orang Rimba had an animistic cosmology and that they carefully respect all forms of life, not taking anything without giving something back. When I arrived, I saw ignorance and carelessness. The questions repeating itself in my early field notes were: 'Why?'

How have physical changes in the environment affected Orang Rimba¹ perceptions of the world, is the foundational question this thesis asks. In the field, I found that the physical changes in the environment – both the political, physical and social environment – have affected Orang Rimba perceptions of the world. In the past all Orang Rimba strived to be isolated whereas today it is mainly the women who are 'isolated'. Orang Rimba view of the forest as their home of never ending resources and a vivid spiritual world is moving towards a struggle for survival against 'the outside'. Many traditions are less important and others are emphasised even more – like protecting women.

This thesis is a contribution to the REDD research group 'REDD in Comparative Perspective: Local and National Government Issues' in collaboration with Gadjah Mada University (UGM), funded by the Norwegian Embassy in Jakarta (see UiO, 2011a,b,c) as well as Cultures of Biodiversity (see SAI, 2011). Although this thesis area of focus is not directly affected by the implementation of REDD, it is an example of how deforestation and conservation are affecting the peoples whose livelihoods are based largely on the forest (UiO, 2011ab).

I will in the following chapters present examples of how physical changes in the environment have affected Orang Rimba perceptions of the world. Their perceptions reflected in *adat* and the importance of distinguishing from 'the outside'. I will show that diminishing forests and increased pressure from conservation and development

¹ Orang Rimba here being selected matrigroups living in the Bukit Duabelas area, mainly the generation of young adults.

projects of provincial, national, and global level can lead to slow assimilation. Mainly focusing on Orang Rimba uniqueness as a matrilineal², animist³ people with a distinct cosmological orientation, and how their perception of the world through *adat* is significant for their survival as forest dwellers. I will show that women have a significant role and that keeping them separate both from men, but also 'the outside', is vital for the existence of Orang Rimba as a distinct group. The profound significance of their social organisation of *adat* and cosmology will thus be the main element of discussion. I suggest that Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs), governments and other institutions working with minorities, and especially with forest dwellers in Southeast Asia, could learn from the example of Orang Rimba and combine conservation of forest through learning from and respecting forest dwellers.

The basis of my findings is the data gathered during 6 months of fieldwork in Bukit Duabelas, Sumatra, where I lived with the forest dwellers Orang Rimba. Anthropologist and Orang Rimba-expert Øyvind Sandbukt, who has maintained regular contact with Orang Rimba since he first visited them in 1979 and is now functioning as an Orang Rimba expert in the NGO Warsi, has played an important role throughout my fieldwork. Regular meetings with him where we discussed my findings and he confirmed that my interpretations coincided with those of Sandbukt's, gave me the confidence to proceed with the hypothesis I had, and that my data was adequate for the process of writing my thesis. Additionally he helped me in the process of getting access, as Orang Rimba highly respect Sandbukt (see Sandbukt, 1988), or 'Uben', as they call him. Because both Sandbukt and me were Norwegian, to Orang Rimba we were of the same kin. During the writing process, I have used both Sandbukt's published literature and Steven Sager – an Australian Anthropologist's doctoral dissertation about Orang Rimba – to corroborate my own material. The match between these authors' publications and my own hypothesis, have made me confident that this thesis is appropriate in an anthropological discourse.

² Matrilineality is here understood as descent traced through women (Keesing & Strathern, 1998 p.193; Seymour-Smith, 1986 p. 185).

³ Animist is here understood as a way of perceiving the world as animated, see chapter four for discussion of animism.

During my time in the field, I tried to look for signs of whether Orang Rimba cared for the jungle, the environment, for 'nature'. I observed the things they did and ways in which they behaved. I explored if there was a close, deep and meaningful relationship with the world within which they dwell. When I asked them if they cared about protecting the forest, they always gave the politically correct answer by saying that they wanted to protect the jungle and that it was important for their existence – Even if they dreamed of marrying a village girl and living a village life. Surprised by their answers' dissonance with their behaviour, I remembered Stewart (1998) repeating the phrase that 'there is always a difference between what people say they do and what they actually do' (also Geertz, 1973b). I immediately felt it was my responsibility to find out if Orang Rimba did care to protect the forest and if they did, in what way did they believe they were protecting it? In the search for answers I found that Orang Rimba were concerned about protecting women. And that indirectly, protection of women entailed a wish to protect the forest. For two reasons: protecting women and keeping them separate from 'the outside' is grounded in the belief that the world is separated between 'inside' and 'outside' where 'inside' is the forest and 'outside' is the village. And that without the forest, the boundaries between the 'outside' and the 'inside' are difficult to keep separate and the isolation of women becomes highly challenging. Before I go any further in the search for answers: the beginning.

Why – REDD, minorities and environmental challenges

For my thesis I wanted to find out how people in one of the most deforested areas in the world have been affected by deforestation and the invasion of big, international companies clearing the land to make enormous oil palm plantations. This brought me to Sumatra, Indonesia.

Indonesia has been and still is one of the tropical countries in the world where deforestation and forest degradation is most severe (Brockhaus et al., 2012; CIFOR, 1996; IUCN, 1992). Between 2000-2005 about 3,5 million ha of forest was deforested in Indonesia (MoFor, 2008, p.24). According to an article published by REDD-monitor in December 2013, Indonesia doubled the deforestation rate in 2011-2012 from approximately 1 million ha per year to 2 million in 2012, referring to Hansen et al.

(2013, no page) where they claim that: “Of all countries globally, Indonesia exhibited the largest increase in forest loss [...]”(see figure 1). This was in a time period where Indonesia had signed a moratorium agreement with the Government of Norway (Regjeringen Stoltenberg II, 2010), and REDD-projects were being prepared several in places in Indonesia.

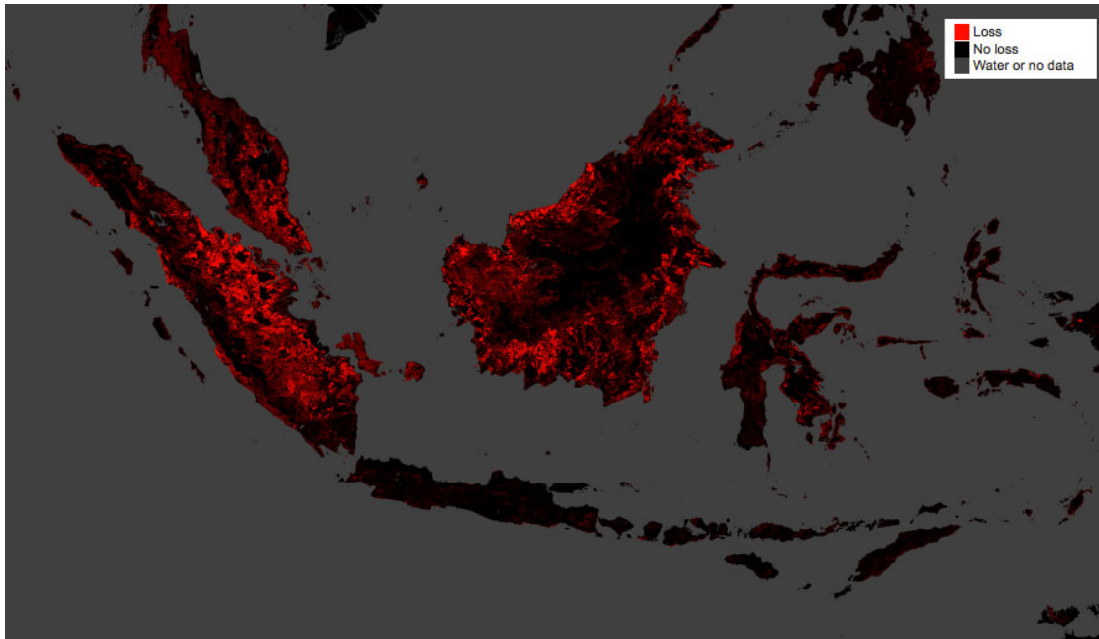


Figure 1. Forest cover loss Indonesia 2000-2012⁴

UN-REDD was established in 2007 with the goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions caused by deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries (Angelsen & Atmadja, 2008). The United Nations’ claim that in order to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases and avoid the global temperature to rise above 2°C, a Reduction of Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD) in developing countries had to be included in the global climate change regime. Individuals, communities, projects and countries that contributed to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions should be rewarded. Simultaneously, this would contribute to sustainable development and reducing poverty (Angelsen & Atmadja, 2008). By 2012, Streck and Parker (2012) claimed that REDD, now with the extra + (REDD+) “seeks to promote economic development and growth without destroying valuable natural resources” (Streck and Parker, 2012, p.112). REDD+ thus works towards the reduction of greenhouse gas

⁴ Map used with permission from Hansen (2014).

emissions through preservation of tropical forests. Further, this would help develop the economy in the relevant countries. As a part of the International Climate and Forest Initiative, Norway signed an agreement in 2011 – with a two years moratorium – to supply REDD with up to NOK 3 billion per year (Angelsen & McNeill, 2012). However, according to ‘Sawit Watch’ (2013), a group lead by Indonesians against palm oil, Indonesia have 3.2 million ha of oil palm plantations, most of them located in Sumatra.

How have people, who have been living in the forests for generations and are dependent on its products in their everyday lives, been affected by a changing environment? How do these people perceive their environment? Are some of the questions this thesis will attempt to answer.

Where - Indonesia, Sumatra, Jambi, Bukit Duabelas

I arrived in Yogyakarta, Indonesia in mid-December 2012 to attend a one-month intensive Indonesian language course. During my time in Yogyakarta, I met inspiring people from all over the world most of whom worked in local NGOs, international corporations like the World Bank, or the occasional PhD student. I attended meetings and workshops at Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM) where I was included in a team of Master students, professors, and professionals all working with REDD in Indonesia.

Somewhere along the way someone said that they might have contacts that could help me get in touch with Orang Rimba – a group of hunter-gatherers who lived in Jambi, Sumatra. Triggered by the romantic description of their ‘harmony with nature’, I started looking for contacts and by February 2013, I arrived in Jambi, ready to meet with the local NGO Kommunitas Konservasi Indonesia Warsi⁵ (KKI Warsi). I had already arranged that they would help me get access to Orang Rimba. Once I Arrived at the Warsi office in Jambi city, I was overwhelmed to meet with a group of Indonesians talking both too fast and too complex in Indonesian, for me to understand much. When the boss finally came to our pre-arranged meeting I asked if we could please speak English, and he agreed to speak slowly in Indonesian. I was introduced to the ‘Orang Rimba team’ of Warsi facilitators and was told that some of them would take me on a 15

⁵ From now on referred to as Warsi.

hours drive to their 'office' and base, in SPI⁶, Sarolangun, the next Monday. I spent a week in Jambi city and got acquainted with Warsi after which they took me to the Bukit Duabelas area and gave me a room in the 'office' (*Kantor*⁷) of Warsi in the outskirts of the national park. From there, they would take me around and introduce me to different Orang Rimba groups or settlements where I finally would choose one as the focus for my research.

After three months in the field, in April 2013 all students partaking in the collaboration between UGM and University of Oslo (UiO) who were undertaking fieldwork in Indonesia gathered again in Yogyakarta for a workshop. Together we prepared presentations and presented our findings and further plans for an audience of representatives from NGOs, REDD-networks, government, UGM and Desmond McNeil from UiO. This experience was a helpful way of sharing experiences and get feedback to proceed with the research. In this process I received guidance and support for my plans ahead before I returned to the field.

Indonesia is a country that has seen both a turbulent and violent past. The overpopulation of Java – the political center of the country – led to the introduction of the transmigration scheme introduced by the Dutch colonial rule in 1905. The scheme was later continued under president Suharto and his New Order Regime in 1966 (MacAndrews 1978; McCarthy 2010), up until today. Transmigration meant that the government moved some of the landless people in Java to the less populated islands. Here new villages were established, and the immigrants were provided with houses and a piece of land (MacAndrews, 1978; McCarthy, 2010). Moving people to remote areas in the middle of the jungle, created conflicts with the natives of those places, mainly Malay villagers and forest dwellers (McCarthy, 2010; Persoon, 1998).

Under Dutch control, the Dutch designated a few forest reserves, and claimed land rights to all other forested areas (Brockhaus et al., 2012). The colonial period was followed by the dictatorship of Sukarno from 1945 up until a military coup around

⁶ SPI is short for *Satuan Pemukiman I* (settlement unit I), which is the last of the transmigration village in this area, also known as Bukit Suban.

⁷ See chapter two for more information about 'the office' (*Kantor*).

1965, which saw the brutal genocide of communists by the New Order regime under the leadership of Suharto (Library of Congress, 2004). Under Suharto the government announced the Basic Forestry Law that reintroduced the government's right to designate forest areas in the same ways the colonial leaders had. This led to the clearing of $\frac{3}{4}$ of Indonesia's forests and in 1982, a Forest Land Use Planning consensus was established where the government mapped the forests (Brockhaous et al. 2012). Today Ministry of Forestry (MoF) regulates the allocation of land. Despite the Decentralisation law that was enacted in 2004, which gave district governments the right to coordinate their land use with provincial and national authorities, a new law was passed in 2008, which gave governors and ministers the right to override land use decisions made by the districts (Brockhaous et al. 2012).

These examples are only a few of many that illustrate the complexity – and turbulence – in Indonesian forestry and land right laws. As demonstrated by Tsing (2005) land rights is a tensed topic in Indonesia. The forests are divided “into zones of human management and zones of resource management” (Tsing, 2005, p. 195). This division of forests into zones shows how the government had a perception of the forest landscape as ‘empty’, ‘wild’, and merely resources, while the people living inside these ‘resources’ can have a distinctively different perception of this very same environment (Tsing, 2005, p.195, 202).

I wanted to locate my research in an oil palm plantation-‘hot spot’. The area of my research was thus located in the Province Jambi in Sumatra. Jambi is one of the provinces in Sumatra where oil palm plantations and timber for pulp and paper dominates the land (Friends of the Earth Sydney, 2010). An estimated 70 percent of Indonesia's total planted area is located in Sumatra (Potter, 2008) and makes the Island what McCarthy (2010, p. 822) formulates as: “The centre of Indonesia's oil palm production [...]” with “The province of Jambi [...]” as “the island's main oil palm frontier”.

Most of the forestland in Jambi has been replaced mainly by large-scale oil palm plantations and by 2009, the Jambi Province reached an approximate of 452,960 ha of oil palm plantations with 448,899 ha recently planted and another 690,656 ha about to

be planted by permit (Samawi, 2009). In areas like this, the local people no longer have the rights to areas that were free for them to access prior to the palm oil-boom (Rainforest Foundation Norway & Friends of the Earth Norway, 2012). The Indonesian state lacks a clear law on land ownership and since the Ministry of Forestry (MoF) controls all the forestland, the local authorities are powerless when the MoF grants logging and plantation concessions to large companies. And it was mainly these numbers and claims brought me to Jambi. However, the Indonesian government have been challenged to realise constitutional court rulings (mainly court ruling number 45/2011 and 35/2012) that acknowledge indigenous peoples as the rightful owners of the land and not the MoF (Community Chamber of National Forestry Council and HuMa, 2013; REDD-Monitor, 2013, October). This is however still only in theory.

Despite a vast cover of oil palm plantations, Jambi includes several national parks⁸ and my research was located in and around a small national park: Taman Nasional Bukit Duabelas⁹ (TNBD) legal through the determination of Øyvind Sandbukt. A park made to help a people: Orang Rimba.

Who – Orang Rimba

“The Indians lived off nature without destroying it, and they adapted themselves to the environment without irredeemably altering it.”
(Murphy & Murphy, 1985, p.21).

Orang Rimba is a forest dwelling people of around 2500 individuals where an estimated amount of 1200 is living in the Bukit Duabelas area within and outside the boundaries of the National park (Benjamin, 2002; Rainforest foundation Norway, n.d.; Warsi & RFN, 2009). Traditionally they are nomadic hunter-gatherers and swidden cultivators who trade forest products with the surrounding *Melayu* (Malay) villagers (Sager, 2008). They live scattered over the Bukit Duabelas area in different kinship groups. Today,

⁸ Bukit Tigapuluh National Park, Kerinci Seblat National Park, Berbak National Park are examples of other national parks in Jambi. In contrast to Bukit Duabelas National Park, these are mainly for conservation of biodiversity.

⁹ Please see chapter two for further elaboration on the national park.

both trading patterns and livelihoods have changed and almost all Orang Rimba groups (*kelompok*) have small rubber plantations both inside and outside the national park. They no longer trade only with Malays but also with Javanese settlements in the transmigration areas. Many have, as part of a governmental settlement program, received houses in the outskirts of the national park, and some have taken work in large-scale oil palm plantations. See map of Orang Rimba settlements in and around Bukit Duabelas national park below (figure 2).

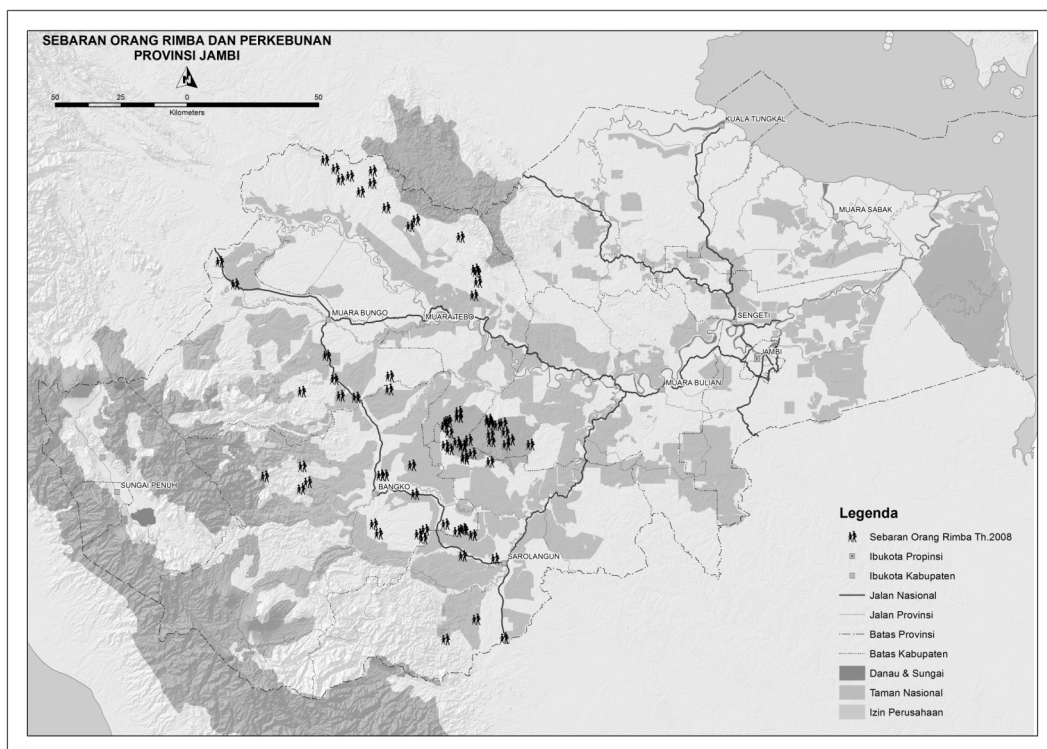


Figure 2. Map of Orang Rimba settlement¹⁰

There are many theories on the origin of Orang Rimba. Both Sager (2008) and Sandbukt (1984, 2000) claim that they might be refugees who hid in the forest during the war or that they are the original Sumatran people. Orang Rimba themselves claimed they were native to Sumatra and that they might have originated from the Minangkabau¹¹ or the Minangkabau from them. Another claim of Orang Rimba is that they are the original people of the world and that the Malays were the people who had left forest life to start

¹⁰ Map from 2008, used with permission from Warsi.

¹¹ The Minangkabau are a matrilineal group from West Sumatra. They have already entered Islam and incorporated Islam as an important part of their ethnic significance. See Benda-Beckman, 1990; Blackwood, 2001; Tanner, 1982).

another life outside: which resulted in the division between two physical worlds. As I will discuss in length in chapters 3 and 4, one of the most important aspects of their perception of the world is their belief in two groups of people, mainly those on the 'inside' and those on the 'outside'. The strong separation between 'inside' and 'outside' is consequently characterised by taboos, nowadays mainly concerning food and women.

This description of Orang Rimba shows that they have much in common with other forest dwelling peoples, such as Chewong in Peninsular Malaysia (Howell, 2011) or the Nuaulu of Central Seram, eastern Indonesia (Ellen, 1988), who are also hunter-gatherers, swidden farmers, and trade with villagers. What make Orang Rimba special is a more rare matrilineal kinship pattern and a strong preservation of women through *adat*¹². Orang Rimba social organization can be described as highly egalitarian (Hagen, 1908 in Sandbukt, 2000), but women have great power over forest resources and the complex laws of *adat* regulates all social interaction not only across genders, but also age, marital status, and kinship ties. Orang Rimba told me that they were excepted from the official Indonesian system of law. I experienced this in practice when the police stopped us and no further questions were asked after the phrase "we are people of the jungle" (*kami* Orang Rimba) was mentioned. They have their own *adat* system and resolve legal issues according to their own social laws. Of course, this also excludes them from rights as per the Indonesian law. This in theory means that they are immune from the local police authorities, but obliged to obey their own system of *adat* law. In cases where there are legal issues between villagers and Orang Rimba, Orang Rimba and villagers meet for a hearing.

Urang nangoi (foreign people) or *urang luor* (People of the outside) are subject to great restrictions in terms of social interaction. At least that is how it has been up until recently. After reading Steven Sager's (2008) thesis with fieldwork from 2003-2004, I

¹² *Adat* is an Indonesian word that often is translated as custom, but all over Indonesia and the Malay world, the term *adat* is a flexible concept carrying a variety of different meanings depending on place, people and situation (Li, 2001). In the *Rimba* (jungle) language *adat* is not only tradition and norms, but the ways Orang Rimba traditionally organise their lives. *Adat* is defined by a covering set of laws and rules that stretches from common laws regarding murder and violence to strict food taboos, lingual taboos and laws regulating gender relations. *Adat* is used and is present in all social interactions and is conformed by one expert in each group or tribe. Through *adat* Orang Rimba perceive the world.

realised the significant changes that have happened only in the last decade. From Sandbukt, who as early as 1984 describes change in the Orang Rimba society and the rapidly vanishing forests, through Sager (2008) who describes a completely different society than what Sandbukt (1984) presents, I was tempted to agree that Orang Rimba is already “extinguished”. As was a common perceptions among Indonesians. Sandbukt (1984, 2000) describes them as people with highly limited contact with the outside world, a strong sense of *adat*, and a significant scepticism towards outsiders and everything the outside represents. Sager (2008) describes them as a society with considerably more contact with the outside. By the time I arrived in the very same area I would often have difficulties distinguishing between unmarried Orang Rimba men and Indonesian villagers.¹³ My first impression was that the biggest difference between Indonesians and Orang Rimba men was the latter’s seeming reluctance to talk. Whereas all of the Indonesians that I met usually gave me an overwhelming portion of attention, all of Orang Rimba I met, gave the impression that they could not care less if I were there or not.

I quickly learned that the marital pattern was still, in principle endogamous¹⁴, and matrilocal and that descent was determined matrilineally. It happened however, that men married in the village outside the jungle. Women seemed to be isolated from the ‘outside’ society whereas men were not. The answer to why need not be complex. Being matrilocal entails the husband to follow the wife and live in her maternal kin-group. In an incidence where an Orang Rimba woman should fall in love with and marry a villager, the pattern would be broken and her matriline would die with her. It is unlikely that a villager would be willing and even accepted to join an Orang Rimba woman in the jungle. As the next chapters will show, a complex set of skills and qualities are required to survive in the jungle. In the following chapters I will thus elaborate on the importance of the isolation of women.

¹³ It will become clear in the next chapters that women are not part of the ‘indistinguishable’ group as they are strongly protected from outsiders.

¹⁴ Endogamous here referring to marriage within the Orang Rimba group (Seymour-Smith, 1986, p.93).

How - Methods, challenges and possible gaps

Over a period of 6 months I stayed approximately two of them on the ‘outside’ with Warsi facilitators and Orang Rimba who lived outside the national park (see figure 2 page 10 for map showing settlements in Bukit Duabelas area). The three first months in Bukit Duabelas I ‘entered’ to many different Orang Rimba settlements before I stayed the rest of the time with one settlement. During the first month in Bukit Duabelas, I occasionally entered the national park with various Warsi facilitators who took me to different Orang Rimba settlements where we spent from one to five nights. I joined the Warsi facilitators when they collected data for surveys, or just checked on the Orang Rimba settlements. Every time I joined Warsi to visit Orang Rimba settlements, a few young and unmarried Orang Rimba men accompanied us as guides. Between visits ‘inside’, I stayed at the *Kantor* (Office) that was occupied by young Orang Rimba males and children who either attended the public school in the village or just lived at the *Kantor*. Mention of the *Kantor* necessitates an explanation of what this ‘*Kantor*’ is and meant to Orang Rimba and me during fieldwork.

The *Kantor* is a traditional-looking two-floor Indonesian wooden house with modern facilities such as water, electricity and cooking plates. Compared to Orang Rimba’s small huts and even village houses, the office is big and costly. Warsi told me that it was built as a place where Warsi staff could stay when they went to the Bukit Suban area¹⁵ to work with Orang Rimba and the village SPI¹⁶ and a place Orang Rimba from all over Bukit Duabelas area could have meetings and Warsi could easily get access to contemporary discussions in Orang Rimba society. By the time I arrived at ‘the office’, it had many more purposes and uses. It was a place where foreigners like myself could stay and learn about Orang Rimba, a base for nature lovers, film teams and everyone who wanted to enter the national park. Warsi staff would supply the visitors with food and guidance having Orang Rimba – children and – unmarried men running around doing errands, washing and cooking. As Warsi staff had stopped entering the forest to teach Orang Rimba, it was now a place where children and youths lived more or less permanently, going to public school in the village. When Warsi staff was not present

¹⁵ Bukit Suban is the name of the area including the nearest village.

¹⁶ SPI is short for *Satuan Pemukiman I* (settlement unit I), which is the last of the transmigration villages in this area, also known as Bukit Suban.

young, unmarried Orang Rimba men, managed the *Kantor*. The youths each had different responsibilities that they managed, with one official 'head of office': Who did not really take any leadership over the other participants. Their names and organization were written on a board by the entrance so everyone could be reminded of it. Every morning the older youths, who did not attend school but was part of the office administration, drove the younger children to school on the two motorcycles Warsi had provided them with. At least that is what I was told upon my arrival.

Two of these unmarried men, one adolescent and one who was older became close friends and always assisted me, taught me *Bahasa Rimba* (the jungle language), took me fishing, hunting, and gathering when I stayed at the *Kantor*.

Gaining access to the Orang Rimba settlements 'inside' and being accepted by them took time. When I visited settlements 'inside' along with Warsi, I was met with strong scepticism towards me. In such occasions I usually had to stay at least 500 meters away from their camp. As Orang Rimba youths from the *Kantor* always guided Warsi in their entries, my two Orang Rimba friends became loyal companions whenever I joined Warsi in visits to the settlements, and eventually they took me to their families 'inside' (the jungle) without the company of Warsi facilitators.

To be clear: during the first two-three months, I entered the settlements accompanied by Warsi facilitators and a couple youths from the *Kantor*. Over time I made my visits only along with Orang Rimba youths I knew from the *Kantor*. It was not before three months of sporadic entries accompanied by Warsi and youths where I stayed at the *Kantor* between visits to the 'inside', that I eventually was invited to stay with one of the settlements permanently. This is not to say that my first couple of months at the *Kantor* were wasted. On the contrary these early months at the *Kantor* where I spent much time with Warsi facilitators, who were very open to me from day one, was crucial for my research. I joined them in their work, and they gave me insights into their organisational working pattern. They taught me about their perspective of Orang Rimba and many of them became close friends. Simultaneously I bonded with the Orang Rimba youths at the *Kantor*, and when Warsi was not there I participated in their everyday practices of fishing, hunting and gathering. Gradually, these youths became close friends

of mine and taught me about *adat*, cosmology, fruits, trees, plants and their perceptions of the world. Eventually women who used to pass by the *Kantor* started approaching me¹⁷. As I had special interest in access to women, I grabbed any chance to try to communicate with these women. The mother and aunt of my young friend were quicker to trust me than the other women and allowed me to accompany them while fishing and bathing.

After weeks of sitting by the hill beside the *Kantor* and interacting with the middle-aged married women, more and more of them began trusting me to interact with their unmarried adolescent daughters. A week or so before I was invited to live in one of the settlements, one of the wives; Induk Nana, came and asked for me when I was at the *Kantor*. Her three-year-old son had burned one of his legs badly after spilling boiling water on himself, and his one leg had a terrible two-third degree burn. I had just returned from the REDD-seminar in Yogyakarta where I had been to the hospital myself after an infection. Luckily, I had a huge stock of antibiotic ointment, antiseptic, and a full kit of bandages and everything one would need. I treated her son and gave her all the medical equipment she needed and also instructed her on how to follow up the treatment. This was the start of a friendship that gave me access not just to her, but her co-wife, their sisters and all of their many daughters. I moved to their settlement and was given a hut in their camp the next week. The women taught me about foods, handicrafts and how to behave. Induk Nana's co-wife's daughter Syng, who was of marital age, but still unmarried broke the *adat* rules and climbed up to my house at night when everyone was sleeping to confess her secret loves. Without knowing it, she taught me a lot about Orang Rimba women. Other married, young women became my friends. In moments where the men were not around, I was exposed to confessions and jokes which I had the impression did not exist in the Orang Rimba female universe.

Because I wanted to present my informants' perspectives of the world, I had planned a phenomenological approach to the field in the way Tilley (1994) explains it as a description of things the way a subject perceives it. As my supervisor, Signe Howell pointed out to me Anthropology has always been phenomenological. A traditional approach to the field, inspired by 'the father of fieldwork', Bronislaw Malinowski (1984)

¹⁷ As women are strongly separated from the outside, no women stayed at the *Kantor*.

could therefore be characterised as phenomenological. I refer here to the anthropology introduced by Malinowski (1984) and longterm fieldwork with participant observation, living side-by-side with your informants, participating in their everyday activities, or as Malinowski (1984, p.7) himself puts it “cutting oneself off from the company of other white men, and remaining in as close contact with the natives as possible [...]”. Added to this I was inspired by Ingold’s idea that we should study the processes of how people among other things perceive “within the settings of their mutual, practical involvement in the lived-in world” (Ingold, 2000 p. 171). I would participate in all activities and practices, share food, houses and work with people, and try my best to emphatically perceive the world as close as possible to the same way my informants perceived it.

In practice I tried to act in and perceive the world in the same way as Orang Rimba, but no matter how hard I tried to copy their actions, my hair always seemed to get stuck in lianas, I always slipped and fell the morning after rain, and it took me three months before I could even make a bonfire. I did participate however, and with time, I did get to share both food, houses and work with Orang Rimba. I was so empathic that I even joined the *musim batuk* (cough season). In order to experience the world the way Orang Rimba experienced it, I tried to influence the field as little as possible. In times where we had no food or where we were sick I did not immediately buy more food or seek medical help. In order to write an interpretation of Orang Rimba perceptions of the world, I tried to perceive and experience the world and landscape with my body like they did (Csordas, 1999).

By being spontaneous, always joining every activity, I did learn ‘*hidup* Orang Rimba’ (life of Orang Rimba). I tapped rubber with them, caught fish with my hands at day with the women, and with machete at night with the men. I went up with the sun every morning, built a fire, fetched water in the river and made coffee with three table spoons of sugar in it. I shared and received food; I stopped using soap, got head lice and lived with it, I was cold at night and I stayed out of the sun at day. Similar to Stoller (1989) who learned to be a Sorko, I experienced with my body the life of Orang Rimba. Through participation, I experienced how it felt to grab fish in the bottom of the river, and with time I learned to separate between mud, and a fish hiding in the mud. I learned that there is a special technique for building a fire and that blowing on it is about more than

just air and wind. I learned that cutting trees with machetes has more to do with technique than the sharpness of the knife. I learned that the isolation of sick people could sometimes save lives.

All these and obviously much more, were experiences I could not have experienced and understood through observation or by asking questions. These were things that no one told me about or described how to do; rather they were things that I learned by doing them. Mauss (1973) claims that we have bodily techniques that are unique to different cultures. Although I was not there because I wanted to learn to feel the fish in the mud or avoid lianas with thorns, it was important that I 'know the landscape' both for practical reasons and for the process of gaining access (Tilley, 1994). Geertz (1973) encourages us to strive for thick descriptions where we try to understand the deeper meaning of cultural practices. I tried to experience the deeper cultural practices with my own body and let myself be "penetrated by the world of the other" (Stoller, 1989, p. 39), with my body as a base for "being-in-the-world" (Csordas, 1999, p.184). Through these practices I gained trust in the group by showing that I wanted to – and could – 'be' Orang Rimba. At the same time it was practically easier for me to participate in activities when I did not spend all my concentration on staying on my feet, but could actually observe, listen and learn from Orang Rimba.

Thick, embodied interpretations based on participant observation was not my only methodological approach. I also asked questions. Because I wanted to learn what was important to Orang Rimba in their daily lives, and listen to what was important to them, I did not formally interview people. I simply listened to what they wanted to tell me, and asked follow-up questions where it seemed reasonable. I also double-checked my data by asking different people about the same things or joined them separately in the same activity to see if the practices differed, being aware of what Stewart (1998) calls 'multiple realities'. People perceive the reality differently. To get a broader perspective of the political issues in the area, I joined meetings: both local to Orang Rimba or with governmental employees of the national park, Warsi or local village authorities. Here I also got insights into the political structure within the Orang Rimba group. Although I must admit that lingual challenges especially in the beginning of my fieldwork, made meetings hard to follow.

I was not only interested in Orang Rimba, but also Warsi, the local NGO working with them in a number of development projects. To get a view of Warsi both as an NGO and the individuals working in Warsi, I stayed in the houses of Warsi facilitators and joined them in formal meetings as well during informal social gatherings. As suggested in the REDD-hand-out on methodological implications that we were given prior to fieldwork and as West et al. (2006) suggests, you should study the agency-side of conservation. I did 'hang out' at the Warsi office both in Jambi city and the '*Kantor*' in Bukit Duabelas.

I had to work actively to be identified with Orang Rimba as I found it hard to get 'real' access to Orang Rimba when they kept conceiving me as a Muslim and an Indonesian, or an *Orang Warsi* (Warsi facilitator) even if I was neither. In the course of the first two months, I was constantly identified with Warsi because I always appeared in the company of a Warsi facilitator. To rid myself of the identification with Warsi, I limited my communication with the facilitators and socialised only with Orang Rimba. I stopped wearing pants and t-shirts and constantly wore *koin* (sarong), ate only with Orang Rimba and was never in the company of 'outsiders'. When I settled with one group I positioned myself as a member of this settlement. I was identified as part of the Kedudung Muda group both by the villagers, and after an event of disputes between two Orang Rimba groups – that I will elaborate on in chapter four – also by Orang Rimba.

When I arrived the field, my Indonesian was far from fluent, but having been surrounded by people whose English skills were limited to simple phrases like 'no smoking' and 'thank you', I was forced to pick up the language at a high speed. The next challenge was the introduction of a second language. Although most of the unmarried Orang Rimba men spoke sufficient Indonesian, none of the women did, and inside the forest, many men did not know Indonesian that well. There is no doubt that a lot of what was said to me, especially in the beginning, but also throughout my fieldwork is subject to misunderstandings, misinterpretations and even guessing. Needless to say, learning a new language is not done overnight and learning two takes even longer. *Bahasa Rimba* (the jungle language) is a very glottal language, which makes it hard to understand (Sager, 2008). In addition there are numerous different dialects and lingual varieties within *Bahasa Rimba*. There are a variety of different 'sets' of words that are

only used in different stages of life, gender and age, which have implications on strict gender stratifications. For instance I can say *olen* (delicious) to the women of the same social status as myself (unmarried), but only if there are no men near us. Men can say *olen* to each other but never to a woman, except their own wife. Women can call each other *guding* (a word for friend), but in conversation with men, they say *bebet* (also means friend) vice versa. All the different uses of words complicates the language further, and although I learned to communicate with both men and women I often had to ask them to explain things twice and with different words. I acknowledge that there are certainly many things I may have misunderstood or misinterpreted. I cannot stress enough the importance of the help from Sandbukt where he confirmed that despite lingual challenges, I was on 'the right track'.

Because Orang Rimba society is in a phase of rapid change and upheaval I have been dependent not only on Øyvind Sandbukt (1984, 1988, 2000, and conversations) but also other published literature about Orang Rimba, such as Persoon (1989), Sager (2008) and Kamocki (1979) to verify my findings. At times, it was rather frustrating not knowing if what I observed and took part in was traditional for Orang Rimba or an imitation of 'outside' society. For example the *Rimba* (jungle) vocabulary excludes many words and concepts that Orang Rimba frequently used in conversation with me. In contrast to when Sandbukt conducted his research in the 80s, they were now used to conversing with outsiders. And I could never know if what they told me was adjusted to suit what they had learned about outsiders or if they told me things 'as they were' in their own perceptions of the world. Most of the Orang Rimba men that I came to know and befriend were used to outsiders entering the forest and asking them questions and joining them in their activities. They were well aware of different religions and had good knowledge about Islam. Most of them knew how to behave and talk in an appropriate manner with Muslims and outsiders (Indonesians) and I got the impression that they were trained to act in this given way when interacting with people from the outside. It was through the women that I found that men had adjusted the information they gave me. Women, being less experienced with outsiders confirmed what vocabulary was Bahasa Rimba and what was Indonesian and were much more straightforward in their communication with me. Sandbukt also functioned as an assurance if I doubted things I learned in the field.

“Things ain’t what they seem” is the title of a paper by Moore (1993). Here, she writes about how materials, in her case guns, and the relation between objects, givers and recipients might be perceived differently by different people, such as the anthropologist and the locals. I argue that the same applies for situations and processes. Murphy and Murphy (1985) point out that the ethnographers’ presence matter in the societies we live. According to them, the researcher’s presence alters the local’s way of life. During my time at the *Kantor* (office) I did not realize the circumstances I created by being there.

When I was introduced to the *Kantor*, I perceived it as a place where some young, unmarried Orang Rimba men and children lived more or less permanently regardless of my presence. Although some entered the forest occasionally during my stay, most of them were usually staying at the *Kantor*. It was not until I ended my fieldwork, went back to Norway and only rarely skype-phoned some of my friends on the site that I started realising what had been happening. Post-fieldwork, my friends reported that the office was more or less empty after I left and that people had stayed there because of me. This suggests that my presumptions about the office as being constantly inhabited by youths were not necessarily correct. My early field notes suggest that the youths usually entered the forest when Warsi was not there and that the office was more or less empty without Warsi’s presence. During my stay however, I found that although some left the office when Warsi was not present, many of them stayed. My perception of becoming a neutral part of the environment was thus not entirely true. My presence created an artificial situation where the youths stayed permanently at the *Kantor* because of my presence. I did not realise that this pattern was created by my presence before I left the field and was told that the *Kantor* was more or less empty. Hence, other situations I have interpreted as ordinary might have been constructed due to my presence.

All my informants grew to become my friends and I am forever grateful for the patience that they had with me. Because I will write things that can be hurtful for some to read, I have chosen pseudonyms for all personal names. Although none of my Orang Rimba friends can read English I want to respect their privacy by keeping their names

anonymous. Some did not want me to use their real names, or they said certain things that they did not want to be recognised for. Others expressed that they did not care if I used their real name. To avoid hurting anyone's sentiments, I thus chose to anonymise all real names. All place names and organisations are, however, referred to by their real names.

What to expect

In this thesis, I will focus on Orang Rimba within and around the Bukit Duabelas national park to illustrate and discuss how physical changes in the landscape are affecting Orang Rimbos' perceptions of the environment i.e. their entire lifeworld and ontology.

The aim of this thesis is to try to give an example of how small societies are affected by environmental changes and invasion of their geographical, economic and social space. I will show that practices and perceptions of the world within a small society of forest dwellers – Orang Rimba – are changing as a result of the increased pressure by global economies and developmental projects.

In chapter two, I will introduce you to Warsi – the main NGO working with Orang Rimba – and demonstrate that what Li (2007) calls the 'will to improve' is also applicable here. Warsi have a set of ideas to help Orang Rimba survive in a world of increasing pressure that do not necessarily match Orang Rimba's own perception of what 'improvement' is. I will discuss the relation between Warsi and Orang Rimba, and illustrate a mutual conflict and communication problems that complicates both Warsi's goals and Orang Rimba's lives, and makes the relationship between Warsi and Orang Rimba fairly difficult.

Chapter three will present *adat* as an encompassing concept where kinship, laws and 'ritual' or cosmology are keys to their perceptions of the world. I suggest that women constitute the basic value of *adat*, of which Orang Rimba may be viewed as a distinguished group. I will try to show how different spheres in their life's worldview is

connected and affected by each other, and why protecting and isolating women is vital for the survival of Orang Rimba.

Chapter four will continue to focus on the concept of separation that was introduced in chapter three. I will elaborate on their cosmological perceptions of 'multiple worlds' and the importance of connection with the 'spirits' in the animated forest. Changes in the physical landscape have created challenges that are affecting Orang Rimba concepts of the world. I will discuss how scarce resources leads to conflicts between Orang Rimba and how existential concepts are threatened. I will illustrate how pressures from 'the outside' make some Orang Rimba groups disrespect the boundaries between significant domains, *adat*, and how this creates conflict within the Orang Rimba tribe. Both this and the previous chapter will conclude with the importance of keeping women separate for the maintenance of Orang Rimba as an eminent group.

In the final chapter I will summarise the changes and challenges discussed in the previous chapters and try to suggest possible solutions. I will argue that in relation to deforestation of tropical rainforests and ways of protecting and preserving it, we can learn from animist peoples such as Orang Rimba. And it might not be the first time someone concludes with this, but I suggest that it could be more efficient to give back their homes to the forest dwellers and learn from their practices of conserving the forests rather than trying to teach them how we think they should.

2

Warsi – The ‘heroes’?

“WARSI has grown to become a very professional NGO of regional importance in the island of Sumatra. Their strength lies in the ability to bridge technical competence in geographical information systems, anthropological research and political lobby work at both province and national levels.”

(Norad, 2007, p.18)

The first time I met Warsi, they gave me the impression that their work with Orang Rimba entitled them to a right to call themselves heroes. Several times during my fieldwork I heard references to Warsi as heroes. Both directly or indirectly.

The official website of Warsi carried the following statement dated 23.12.13, regarding their role while working with Orang Rimba:

“The Orang Rimba need security of access to land and forest resources. Development activities that ignore this requirement are meaningless. What we are doing, especially aimed to understand the socio – culture of Orang Rimba and assist them to get access to support their life in the future: **1.** Carry out deep researches on the socio-culture and the change of Orang Rimba. **2.** Develop alternative education cadres (literate, numerate) of Orang Rimba to help them in interactions and transactions with outsiders. **3.** Connect them to public health service and make them realize to have the service regularly. **4.** Conduct legalization process on their land that are the remnant of plantation and transmigrates settlement along the Sumatran High-way.” (Warsi, 1999-2013¹⁸).

In this chapter, I will give a brief introduction of the Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Warsi and their work with Orang Rimba. After briefly going through Warsi’s

¹⁸ These data were retrieved 23.12.2013. In the time of writing Warsi have updated their entire website with new design and with much more limited information available.

history and organisational structure, I will discuss the actual role of Warsi in Bukit Duabelas and my experience regarding their work with Orang Rimba in this area. Warsi's relationship with Orang Rimba appeared to me as one of ambivalence. The 'will to improve' (Li, 2007) together with old prejudices and ignorance of important cultural practices, created an arena of ambivalence both for Orang Rimba as well as for the Warsi facilitators. I will discuss these findings and thereby conclude that the relationship between Warsi and Orang Rimba is complex and challenging.

Funding

Warsi receives funding from a variety of different sources including Rainforest Foundation Norway and UN-REDD+. The Orang Rimba-project started under the aegis of Norwegian Agency for Development Corporation (Norad¹⁹) through Rainforest Foundation Norway (RFN²⁰) in 1998. The funding was granted with the aim of working for the permanent protection of tropical forests, increased participation by Orang Rimba in the forest conservation project, and for a development that enables the forest dwellers to control their own resources and land within protected areas (Warsi, 1994-2013; RFN, 2013; Norad, 2011). Norad maintains that RFN used to be the sole financial supporter of Warsi, whereas in 2007 they only supported between 20 – 30 % of Warsi's entire budget (Norad, 2007, p.25). According to the same Norad Report:

“[...] WARSI has grown from a small local organization into a major NGO with a staff of more than one hundred during the cooperation period with RFN.

Capacity in planning and reporting has been greatly improved and to the extent that the organization is now attracting other donors. “ (Norad, 2007, p.19):

As compared to other NGOs similar to Warsi, which work in a rather small geographical area, Warsi today have an influential role internationally. Warsi is funded, followed and supported by international organisations like RFN, The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Climate and Land Use Alliance (CLUA) and the Ford Foundation. But they are also a part of the international Millennium Development Goals

¹⁹ From now on Norad.

²⁰ From now on RFN.

and funded by UN Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (UN-REDD).

The Orang Rimba project is still funded solely by RFN. And in 2013 Warsi and RFN started a new 5-year project period with Orang Rimba, where Warsi was granted a budget of IDR 21.996.354.002, just over USD 2,3 million for the whole project period. In total Warsi has a budget of IDR. 10.600.000.000, or just over USD 1,1 million per year divided between six projects (Warsi, 2013).

According to Warsi's latest application for funding to RFN with the Orang Rimba project for the period of 2013-2017 they aim to achieve the following goals:

1. Push for the formulation of natural resource management policies that shall protect the rights of Orang Rimba and Orang Batin²¹.
2. Advocate towards achieving recognition of the land rights for Orang Rimba and Orang Batin and also getting other compensations from companies.
3. Advocate the development and fulfilment of the rights that Orang Rimba and Orang Batin have to governmental health service and education.
4. Recognising the identity of and maintaining solidarity with Orang Rimba and Orang Batin (Warsi, 2013, own translation).

Among the methods Warsi claim they will use to achieve these 'goals' are surveys, interviews with the different parties, create maps, documentation from media coverage, document regulations, and observation of the target group (Warsi, 2013). They further promise to create reports, document meetings, document media coverage and surveys that will again document the progress of the project. A lot of what they will do, is thus to document.

The REDD project is relevant for Warsi's work with Orang Rimba as both Warsi's REDD project and their Orang Rimba-project is monitored through RFN. In the project period 2009-2011, Warsi received approximately USD 632.883 for the REDD-project and in 2008-2012 approximately USD 1.877196 for the Orang Rimba-project, both from RFN

²¹ Orang Batin is another minority that will not be discussed further here.

(Warsi, 2013). Although the Orang Rimba-project is not part of REDD, the same partners are thus supporting both Warsi's REDD- and Orang Rimba-program. With these projects interrelated, there might be room to discuss whether the work Warsi do with Orang Rimba already is a REDD-project? Warsi's REDD program states that it is to:

“[...] lobby and advocate for communities in and around the forest and participate in the preparation of development plans and strategies for REDD and have the government authorities recognize the interests of the community and develop the REDD mechanism” (Warsi, 1999-2013, own translation).

The description Warsi gives of their REDD-project and the description they give of their Orang Rimba-project is not remarkably different, and it is therefore REDD may become relevant in Bukit Duabelas. Even if REDD is not officially the project in Bukit Duabelas National Park (TNBD) and did not even exist in 1998, the fact that the donors of these two projects today are the same, and the structure of the projects are much similar, gives reason to argue that Norway's guidelines to the organization of Warsi's work in and around TNBD is common with REDD principles. Warsi's role internationally should thus not be underestimated. With donors such as RFN and NORAD, being part of the internationally recognized REDD-project, Warsi plays an important role on the international map of forest conservation.

Achievements

Warsi was established as an organization in 1992 when a group of environmental activists together with other small NGOs decided to create one big organisation to work in South Sumatra, West Sumatra, Bengkulu and Jambi where it has its main office today (Warsi, 1999-2013). The original focus of Warsi was biodiversity conservation and later community development. In July 2002 Warsi added to its name *Komunitas Konservasi Indonesia* (Indonesian Conservation Community) together with an expansion of their focus area to also include local communities. Work with Orang Rimba was mainly

initiated by the anthropologist Øyvind Sandbukt²². After his fieldwork with Orang Rimba for twelve months in 1979-80 as part of a research fellowship²³, his interest and engagement in this unique group triggered him to initiate a project that would help maintain their traditional lifestyle in a rapidly changing environment (Sandbukt, 1984). Sandbukt contacted the already existing NGO Warsi and encouraged them to start the Orang Rimba-project. And in 1998 RFN became a sponsor and partner in Warsi's work with Orang Rimba (Warsi, 1999-2013).

“Through the activities of RFN and a local partner [Warsi], the national park Bukit Duabelas was established to protect the traditional living area of the Orang- Rimba indigenous group. They have achieved users' rights in the national park and successful measures have been taken to protect the park from illegal logging. Basic education, including mathematics has enabled the younger Orang Rimba to relate more successfully with other local populations in the area.”
(Norad, 2007, p.36)

Warsi claims to be the first organisation to enter the jungle and teach Orang Rimba to read, write and simple mathematics. In 1998, Warsi entered the forest when Orang Rimba still held a strong scepticism towards anyone from the outside. According to Warsi, Yusak, the first “education hero” defied all obstacles, gained Orang Rimba's trust and convinced them that education would not threaten their *adat* or destroy their community as they originally feared. According to the story Warsi provides on their website and a memorial I participated in March 2013 (see figure 3 below from the memorial), Yusak lived with Orang Rimba for weeks at a time, truly dedicated to his work (Warsi, 1999-2013).

²² Norad through RFN sponsors Warsi's work with Orang Rimba in both the Bukit Duabelas area, Bukit Tigapuluh and Orang Rimba who lives along the Sumatran Highway. Today this also includes development project in the surrounding villages (Warsi, 1999-2013).

²³ The fieldwork was financed by the Norwegian Research Council for Science, and the Humanities in a Research Fellowship.

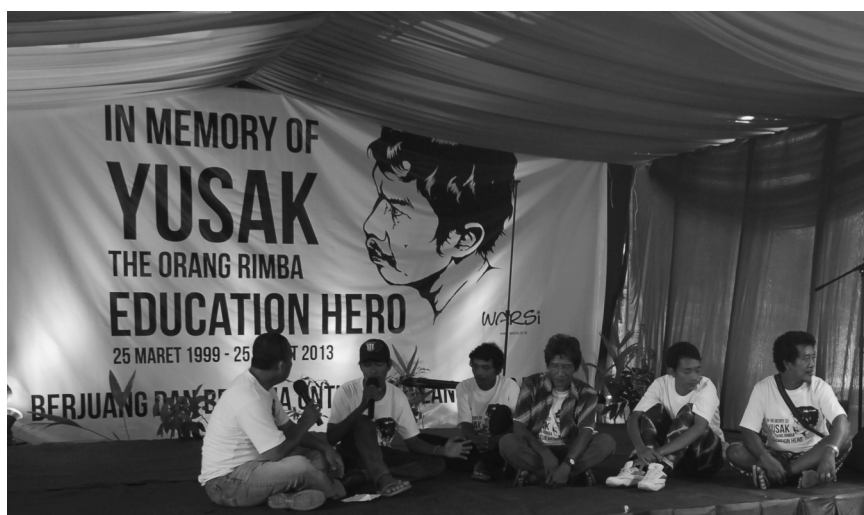


Figure 3. Orang Rimba interviewed at the memorial of Yusak, March 2013.

Although Warsi explicitly describes how they used – and claim they still use – methods for teaching Orang Rimba that were especially developed to meet the needs, and preferences of the jungle people with emphasis on avoiding damage of their unique *adat*, today Warsi rather have the Orang Rimba children enter public school in the villages. In the villages *budak rimba* (jungle children) learn the same official curriculum as *urang luor* ('outsiders'/villagers). The unique teaching methods Warsi claim to have developed especially for Orang Rimba is not applied in public schools. According to a recent publication by Lentera Indonesia (2014 (video)) in collaboration with Warsi, new facilitators have exchanged those of my acquaintance and started entering the jungle again to teach *anak rimba*. From experience however, I discovered that promotional videos do not always reflect reality and as I am not there to observe the actual situation today, I do not know if this is a one-time incident or if the facilitators are indeed entering regularly.

Although there may be reasons to question some of Warsi's achievements, and their effect on Orang Rimba, much of Warsi's work has proven positive for Orang Rimba. Warsi have made a book of 11 chapters about Orang Rimba *adat*, to be included in the public primary schools in the Sarolangun local district where Orang Rimba lives. The project is an attempt to educate villagers who are in daily contact with Orang Rimba about Orang Rimba, and avoid reproduction of the negative stigmas many villagers have towards the forest dwellers. On January 2nd 2014, National Geographic Indonesia published an article stating that local government has accepted Warsi's curriculum

concerning Orang Rimba, and that all fifth graders in public schools in Sarolangun will learn about Orang Rimba from now on (Nara, 2014). I did not get the chance to see this curriculum myself and can therefore not say anything about the quality of the contents. Warsi however presented it as a victory that will remove stigma by educating villagers about Orang Rimba and add to the list of reasons for Warsi to call themselves heroes.

The attempt to educate Orang Rimba into protecting their territory did not save the forest from national logging concessions, transmigration settlements and extensive oil palm plantations. As stated in the report made by RFN in collaboration with Warsi (Warsi & RFN, 2009) 16 of 28 large-scale forest concession holders had their site in forests where Orang Rimba had lived for generations.

The proposal to make Bukit Duabelas a national park was in addition to Warsi's Orang Rimba-project initiated by Sandbukt after the seminar Norwegian-Indonesian Rain Forest and Resource Management Project (NORINDRA²⁴). The NORINDRA project was what Sandbukt calls a "complimentary multidisciplinary" project (Sandbukt, 1994, p.205) with scientists from both natural and social sciences. Mainly 'the Norwegian Research Council for Science and the Humanities', 'the Ministry of Environment' and 'the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' funded the project where 'the Centre for Environment and Development' at the University of Oslo had the administrative responsibility (Sandbukt & Wiriadinata, 1994, p.viii). The main objective of the project was:

"[...] to contribute through multidisciplinary research in a rain forest area to the development of integrated planning of sustainable development in which the *in situ* conservation of biodiversity constitutes an essential aspect" (Sandbukt & Wiriadinata, 1994, p.vii).

Although the NORINDRA reports primary focus is on Bukit Tigapuluh as a conservation area, Bukit Duabelas entailed this project. According to Warsi & RFN (2009) the 'Project Habitat and Resource management for Orang Rimba' was triggered by "a survey as preparation of technical aspects such as geography, topography, biology and anthropology to develop Bukit 12 as a national park" (Warsi & RFN, 2009, p. 11). In

²⁴ From now on NORINDRA.

2000 the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry officially acknowledged a small area of around 60.000-hectare forestland as a national park and a reserve for Orang Rimba (Norad, 2011; Rainforest Foundation Norway; Warsi 1999-2013; Warsi & RFN, 2009). In the initial phase Warsi worked only with Orang Rimba. With the establishment of the national park, however hostile villagers that were unhappy with the law enforcement of illegal logging created new challenges for Warsi's work with Orang Rimba and now the national park. To prevent conflict, Warsi expanded their project to include surrounding villages in the buffer zone areas of the park (Warsi & RFN, 2009, p.11). According to statistical data from Warsi there were 25 villages included in the project in 2009 (Warsi & RFN, 2009, p.11).

TNBD, or Bukit Duabelas National Park, is an exception from the Indonesian law on National parks. National parks should be for the conservation of biodiversity, not peoples. According to Norad, Bukit Duabelas was the first national park established to protect indigenous peoples livelihoods in Indonesia (Norad, 2011). Since then, the Indonesian government have refrained from giving logging concessions or plantation permits to oil palm companies within the boundaries of the park. It is identified as a protected area only to be used by Orang Rimba. In practice however, the boundaries are pushed and you can unfortunately find both villagers and illegal oil palm crops within the national park (Wawrinec, 2010).

The jungle inside the national park can be described as thin. All the *nangoi*²⁵ (foreigners) who had once entered in the past always uttered a nostalgic statement about how the forestland had changed since their last visit. An Indonesian cameraman also functioning as an interpreter for a foreign moviemaker once visited the park, when I was there and with great nostalgia he described to me the changes in the landscape. He described trees that where no longer there, roads and oil palm plantations replacing thick, ancient jungle. His descriptions were performed with deep, emotional engagement leaving the *nangoi* looking fascinated. I often heard descriptions both by Orang Rimba and outsiders of how the jungle inside the park had changed. Even if oil palm companies had stayed out of the park, villagers had not. More than a kilometre

²⁵ *Nangoi* is Bahasa Rimba and literally means white pig, but is also the word for foreigner or people from outside the forest.

into what had been the official boundary of the national park, oil palms dominated the land. Even a village cemetery was established within the national park. A car road went all the way into the Warsi-office (*kantor*) that certainly made a mark in the landscape. I was told that Warsi with the permission from Orang Rimba was licensed to build the *Kantor*, at the cost of the forest: It was supposed to be a positive intervention for Orang Rimba.

The national park was thus established with the principle that Orang Rimba should be free to use the forest and its resources however they like. Orang Rimba themselves, told me that they had no restrictions on animals to hunt even though threatened species like the sun bear and the Sumatran tiger lived inside the park. They were not allowed to sell certain trees, but they were allowed to cut them down to cultivate the land. The only two official prohibitions were that they were not allowed to plant oil palm trees or sell forestland to people other than Orang Rimba.

Bukit Duabelas National Park (see figure 4 below) is often presented as a prime example of how government takes responsibility and grants powerless people a piece of land for their own cultural survival. Simultaneously preserving tropical forest. However many factors indicate that there might be another thought to why these few hectares were 'given' to Orang Rimba, under close supervision by both Warsi and a governmentally controlled office. The park holds the largest concentration of Orang Rimba in Indonesia, who are in almost daily contact with 'the outside'. This happens either through education, surveys, attractive benefits such as housing, low price-rice, etc. Is the National Park a way of slowly assimilating Orang Rimba into broader society?

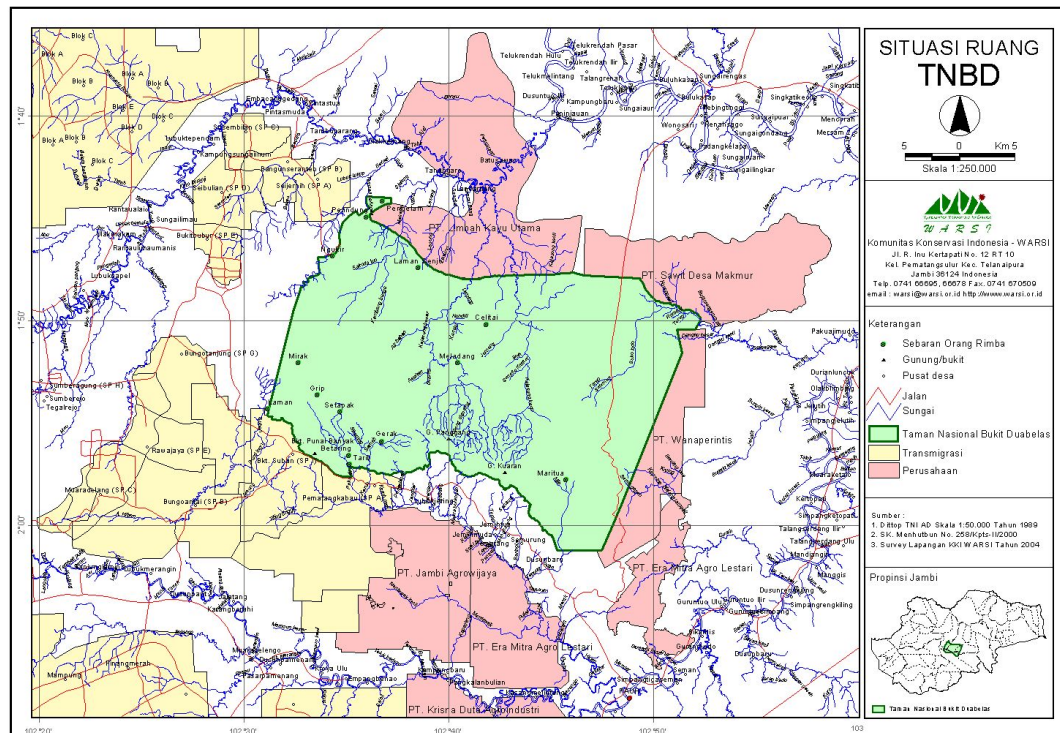


Figure 4 (TNBD) Bukit Duabelas National Park²⁶

Regarding health service, Warsi started introducing Orang Rimba to Western medicine 10 years ago (Warsi, 1999-2013). Although Orang Rimba originally were sceptical towards accepting Western medicine as a substitute to their traditional plant medicine, Warsi gradually convinced them that pharmaceutical medicine was a better solution. Today Orang Rimba are occasionally brought to hospitals for severe diseases or sometimes even for giving birth. In 2007, Warsi started the work to convince the local government that Orang Rimba should get free medical help through *Jaminan Kesehatan Masyarakat* (public health insurance) and by 2008, 472 health cards were granted to Orang Rimba by the local government in Sarolangun district (Warsi, 1999-2013)²⁷. This means that Orang Rimba get free medical help at two hospitals in the nearest towns; Sarolangun and Bangko. Warsi are also working to convince the local health centre in the nearby village of Bukit Duabelas, to give free health care to Orang Rimba, as the district hospitals are hours away with motorcycle and difficult for Orang Rimba to travel to without the assistance of Warsi. Although Warsi claim on their website that they visit Orang Rimba every month to do medical checks and treat less severe diseases, I only once during my stay, witnessed Warsi giving medical help when their nurse visited the

²⁶ Used with permission from Warsi (2008).

²⁷ By the time I did my fieldwork however, many of the health cards had still not arrived.

office in Bukit Suban. Warsi themselves several times complained over their shortcomings as they had only one health facilitator to cover all the areas.

In the central healthcare law no. 40, 2004, reinforced by Act no. 24, 2011, the government is to ensure the health of all citizens also the poor, which include Orang Rimba. The new law is supposed to take effect in January 2014 (Warsi, 1999-2013). Because most Orang Rimba lack *SIM* or *KTP* – a formal identity card which requires a birth certificate and *kartu keluarga* (family tree) – they are not necessarily included in this law. Warsi are working to convince the government to include Orang Rimba without *SIM* or *KTP* (identity cards) (Warsi, 1999-2013).

Warsi have without doubt many victories and achievements in their work with Orang Rimba. The accomplishment of getting the government to acknowledge Bukit Duabelas as a national park may in itself be reason good enough to call themselves heroes. In addition they are working to abolish the stigma and racism that contribute to the segregation of Orang Rimba and the common perception that they belong to a lower category of humans. Although their health care system is far from perfect they have made some improvements by working to include Orang Rimba in governmental health care. As stated in the Warsi & RFN-report (2009, p.2) however, “there is much room for improvement”.

The less successful aspects of Warsi was among other things reflected in my first observation that many of the Warsi facilitators displayed a lack in knowledge about Orang Rimba *adat* and a reluctance to respect Orang Rimba culture and traditions. Trying to educate Orang Rimba into using soap, bathing twice or more a day, sitting down in one place eating, etc. which are not present in Orang Rimba cultural habits, demonstrate how the facilitators do not respect the distinct culture of Orang Rimba. Warsi’s education program is neither optimal and does not respect *adat* when they take the children away from their customary land, and work towards inclusion of women. Besides, the Orang Rimba youths and children do not go to school regularly even when they are away from their parents. A lack in the supervision of the school children results in a pattern where children are away from their parents in the forest, staying at the *Kantor*, but still only sporadically enter public school in the village. Basically the result

is an unrewarding and unproductive routine where the youths spend their day 'hanging out' at the *Kantor*, doing close to nothing. Encouraged by RFN, Warsi further work in opposition to their own goal of 'preserving *adat*' when they push to make females go to school (Warsi & RFN, 2009). Hence, with or without knowing the consequences of these and many other factors, Warsi and RFN are working towards a slow assimilation of Orang Rimba into major society.

In 1989, Persoon claimed that there were no sign of change in the policy of the Indonesian government regarding integration of the 'Kubu'²⁸ (Orang Rimba), except one: Orang Rimba, the forest dwellers in Bukit Duabelas were pushed further and further up the mountains to make way for logging companies and transmigration settlements. Eventually, according to Persoon (1989), a group of Orang Rimba took action and went to the local government to complain that their lives were taken from them.

Simultaneously, the Indonesian government continued the transmigration scheme. This meant areas of around 298.995 hectares forestland being opened up to populations of Javanese migrants who were each given a house and land (RFN & Warsi, 2009). The new population did not only occupy areas that had formerly been jungle landscape where Orang Rimba had free access, but they also brought a new culture, language, law, religion, opinions, knowledge, power and not the least, lack of knowledge regarding Orang Rimba. The generation-long mutual respect between Orang Rimba and the surrounding Malay villages were unknown to the new Javanese arriving at the scene, and their interest was unsurprisingly to work for their own benefit, adding another threat to Orang Rimba livelihood. Transforming Bukit Duabelas into a national park was thus to help Orang Rimba survive in their traditional habitat, protecting their homes and livelihood from outside threats²⁹.

²⁸ 'Kubu' is a word that in the past have been frequently used to refer to Orang Rimba.

²⁹ This is the official reason presented to the public. However, the reason why the government agreed to make this exception and grant Orang Rimba with a national park, might have much more assimilating effects than what was immediately expected.

Organisation of Warsi - Who are Orang Warsi

So far this chapter have discussed the structure of Warsi. Here the discussion continues by looking more closely at Warsi in relationship with Orang Rimba.

Warsi staff is divided into different work-groups which each have a specific area of focus. The facilitators within these groups have different tasks. One group work with Orang Rimba, another with the REDD-project, etc. The staff can rotate between the different groups and do not necessarily stay long in one group whereas others have been in the same group for years. The composition of the Orang Rimba-project-group is mainly staff with BA or lower level in anthropology or forestry. They can be employed either as responsible for surveys, as teachers, or some gave me the impression that they were there only to 'check on' Orang Rimba. Common for all the facilitators is that they by the end of each month have to provide a report and discuss their findings in an internal workshop at the office in Jambi city. Here the leader of the Orang Rimba-project-group come and listen to his *anak buah* (staff) and add suggestions and inputs where he finds it necessary. The one *bos* (head) of Warsi's Orang Rimba-project-group rarely visits the field, and for the six months I spent in Bukit Duabelas, he never went to visit Orang Rimba himself. The rest of the facilitators, however regularly visited the *Kantor* in Bukit Suban, but did not necessarily enter the jungle.

In conversations with Warsi-staff, some expressed that they strongly wanted to contribute to conservation of the rainforest and did not seem to care too much about Orang Rimba, but rather with maintaining the forest. Others however expressed a concern for Orang Rimba and that the children were growing up without an education. Whereas others again did not say much about their background for working in an environmental NGO concerned with minority groups and global environmental issues.

In the following section I will highlight some of the contradictions I perceived about Warsi's official goal and the role I experienced them having in their practical work with Orang Rimba.

In February 2013 one of the Warsi facilitators let me join him when he visited different Orang Rimba settlements in and around the national park. Countless hours was spent

on a motorcycle driving through endless oil palm plantations. The facilitator became a good friend and with great enthusiasm he taught me about birds and plants. His dedication revealed no doubt that he truly cared about 'saving' the remaining Indonesian rainforest. One day when we were driving through the oil palm plantations on our way to an Orang Rimba settlement far from the *Kantor*, he turned around and made a comment about the endless plantations: "*tidak bagus untuk ekosistem tapi bagus untuk ekonomi*" ("It's not good for the ecosystem, but it's good for the economy") he said and laughed. Sitting with my notebook in my hands I quickly wrote down his uttering. His words made me wonder what he had meant. Maybe my speculations were an exaggeration and he really did not mean much about it. Either way I would later find out that palm oil brought wealth to more than just remote plantation owners 'out there'.

When I first arrived in Jambi City and met with Warsi, I stayed at a friend's house outside the city. When I mentioned in a meeting with Warsi the inconvenient distance I travelled everyday, one of the leaders offered me to stay at his house for the few days I was in Jambi. Arriving there, his house looked more like a castle than a house to me. A grand two-floor marble stone house with decorative pillars, carvings and a built-in garage surrounded by a great green lawn enclosed by a two-meter high iron railing, met me. A gardener and a maid guarded the house together with four-five pure-breed dogs. My first thought was that Warsi paid their bosses too much. It was only months later that I found out that it was not the Warsi salary that had paid for the house but rather the income he had from being an oil palm plantation owner himself.

When I mentioned this to a friend he quickly killed my amazement by assuring me that this was nothing but normal. – "You're in Indonesia now".

Ignorance and communication problems

In the 2009 report Warsi and RFN produced together: 'Evaluation of Habitat and Resource Management Project', the lack of both Warsi's and RFN's understanding of Orang Rimba *adat* becomes clear.

“There are not many girl students; maybe the parents do not think that it is equally important for women to be able to get education. Alternatively, maybe they still feel reluctant if a male staff becomes their teacher” (Warsi & RFN, 2009, p.39)

A report made by Norad reveals the same:

“Also, partners have taken care to include women in training and awareness raising activities, thus given impetus to gender mobilization. Particularly among local villagers and indigenous peoples women are often doubly marginalized. It is therefore increasingly important to include them in activities. This in itself is a contribution to building civil society.” (Norad, 2007, p.38)

Despite my relatively short time in the field, I found it obvious that the reason women among Orang Rimba do not attend classes, is neither because of male presence or that it is “less important” for women to get an education. On the contrary, it is highly important that women do not attend school, as this would be the last step towards the death of Orang Rimba *adat*. As will be elaborated in chapter 3, women are the ‘symbol’ that maintains the *adat* system of Orang Rimba. Their significance is too important to risk being destructed by *adat urang luar* (outsider’s *adat*). Having women educated into the world of the outside would mean the final step towards the end of Orang Rimba traditional society. I will not spend much space discussing the importance of women here, as I plenty of times will support this suggestion in the following chapters.

Another practice I experienced as problematic to Orang Rimba was the separation of children from their parents. Temenggung³⁰ and many of the older men often complained that Warsi did not know *adat* and requested that they send the children at the office back to the forest when they did not attend school. They need to learn *adat*, Temenggung and Bepaknuju – two well-respected middle-aged Orang Rimba men – told me one evening. They expressed their worries that their children spent too much time on the outside and away from their traditional lives inside the jungle. On the outside

³⁰ Temenggung is the title name of the popular elected ‘chief’ of Orang Rimba. See chapter 3 for a more elaborate description.

they do not learn *adat* and they are not expected to follow or respect Orang Rimba *adat*. Orang Rimba *adat* is reserved for 'inside' (the jungle) and the youths spending all their time 'outside' both forget the *adat* they already know, and are prevented from acquiring higher levels of *adat*. Both Temenggung and many of the fathers 'inside' frequently expressed their concern over this. One night they even had a meeting discussing how they should deal with this dilemma. As Bepaknuju told me in concern: We want our children to go to school but we also want them to learn *adat* Orang Rimba.

Several places in the Warsi & RFN report (2009), there are formulations that reveal a lack of understanding and knowledge about Orang Rimba *adat* and culture. The report state that the project's goal is to "achieve workable collaborative management of Bukit Dua Belas National Park forests based on Orang Rimba and joint organization of village communities." And further: "[...] providing better access to education and health services, promoting income generating activities and advocacy of the Orang Rimba rights" (RFN & Warsi, 2009, p.2). These goals can with difficulty be achieved if the people and organisations working with Orang Rimba do not have in-depth knowledge about Orang Rimba *adat*. As I will discuss in the next chapters *adat* is fundamental to Orang Rimba. Maybe the reasons Warsi facilitators often complained that Orang Rimba were difficult to work with was because they had expectations that were contrary to Orang Rimba *adat* and culture? Let me illustrate.

Many of the Warsi facilitators expressed their frustration to me over how they could never trust Orang Rimba to do as they asked them to. They complained that Orang Rimba were lazy (*malas*) because they did not bother to show up on scheduled meetings or because they refused to join Warsi in events like the memorial of Yusak that was arranged in March 2013. On the other hand, my Orang Rimba-friends complained that Warsi did not pay them to participate in such events and that they found many of the meetings meaningless, as they saw no direct result from them. Orang Rimba are hunter-gatherers and occasional swidden farmers with a nomadic lifestyle and immediate consumption. As Woodburn (1982) and Howell (2011) exemplifies, immediate consumption societies are often characterised by a mentality where they expect immediate results and where they do not see the value of long-term planning. The facilitators' frustration over unreliable Orang Rimba may not be intentional from

Orang Rimba point of view. They simply do not see the point. Orang Rimba are highly spontaneous and appreciate immediate results. Mutually Orang Rimba complained that Warsi seemed to never get anything done and were equally lazy (*bermalai*).

In my perception there is a mutual misunderstanding of each other's cultural habits. Orang Rimba expect to see immediate results whereas Warsi expect Orang Rimba to follow scheduled events. Warsi did not see that to Orang Rimba, what Warsi did, made no sense. Bureaucracy can take months and years. For Orang Rimba having a meeting in January where the results did not show before months or maybe years later was equal to no result. For Warsi it was frustrating that Orang Rimba did not appreciate their 'will to improve' (Li, 2007) and seemed not to care about all the work Warsi invest in trying to change policies and help Orang Rimba strengthen their position in the local and national policies.

A common perception among forest dwellers or other 'ethnic'³¹ minorities in Indonesia is that they are of lower social status than majority groups (Benjamin, 2002; Turner, 1997 etc.). This is evident in the many names assigned to them that hold negative connotations. Orang Rimba have for a long time been referred to as *Kubu*. *Kubu* is in Indonesia associated with wildness and primitiveness and is generally a word that carries negative connotations. Among others are Sandbukt (1984, 1988, 2000), Sager (2008), and Wawrinec (2010) who confirm these perceptions. Further Benjamin (2002) and others of the same edition argue that these negative perceptions of minorities' exists all over the Malay world. Carey (1976, p. 3) discuss the Malay word *Sakai* that was commonly used about 'aborigines' or *Orang Asli* (the original people) of Malaysia. According to Carey (1976) *Sakai* in Malay means 'slaves' or dependants. Needless to say this bring negative connotations. Concepts like *Masyarakat terasing* (isolated communities) and *yang belum agama* (without religion) connotes to primitiveness and 'underdeveloped' peoples (Persoon, 1998). Such associations create a social gap between these groups and the majority. These stigmas were by the villages surrounding Bukit Duabelas mostly held towards non-Muslim people. Although, much thanks to

³¹ Ethnic minorities are here a reference to groups of the Indonesian population that the government recognise as of different origin than the majority. Examples can be Chinese, Malays, or even Papuans.

Warsi, most people have stopped using demeaning words like Kubu about Orang Rimba, the attitudes have thus not necessarily disappeared.

It is a common perception among Indonesians that forest dwellers are dirty (*kotor*) and smelly (*berbau*). These attitudes met me long before I experienced them first hand in the national park's buffer zone villages. When I told Indonesians I met in Jambi city that I was going to live with Orang Rimba a common reaction was to warn me that they smelled and that they were dirty. When I first met with Warsi facilitators they warned me against the same things. Even the facilitators who worked in Bukit Duabelas often expressed what I perceived as negative feelings towards Orang Rimba. Some referred to the Orang Rimba youths at the office as lazy (*malas*) because they did not bother to clean the office or go to school, and smelly (*berbau*) if they did not take a bath at least once a day. In discussion with the facilitator responsible for the survey about Orang Rimba selling forestland inside the national park to villagers, he argued that Orang Rimba were much richer (*kaya*) than the villagers because they could use the forest resources freely whereas the villagers could not.

These attitudes towards forest dwellers or other marginalised groups are thus proved by earlier literature such as Benjamin (2002), Sandbukt (1984), Sager (2008), Persoon (1998), Stella (2007) and many with them to be common in Indonesia and the Malay world. And as it is common in Indonesia to say that forest dwellers smell, my experience is that this pronouncement is not necessarily intended to be harmful. The degrading voice many Indonesians take when they discuss marginalised groups is simply internalised in their language and the real meaning and potential hurtfulness of such utterances are not necessarily reflected upon.

Howell and Lillegraven (2013) similarly argue that to say that forest dwellers are richer than villagers may yet partly be true. Even though the forest resources are limited today, they used to be plenty. During fruit season both fruits and the white pig, *nangoi*, which migrate from the coastal areas are rich, and Orang Rimba can feast on the resources of the forest. Their flexible lifestyle enables them to move to where the resources are, and in theory give them access to plenty of goods that the villagers must work hard to obtain. Since the introduction of the Oil palm and later the so-called 'oil

palm-boom' (McCarthy, 2010), however the transmigrates with their own small-scale palm oil fields have a high income compared to Orang Rimba and other rubber farmers.

The conflict between Warsi and Orang Rimba were apparent in many ways.

When I first arrived at the *Kantor* of Bukit Suban we made plenty of food every day, Warsi staff arranged many different activities, and seemed close with the Orang Rimba youths living there. After my first two weeks at the *Kantor* with multiple visits to Orang Rimba settlements, the Warsi staffs were going back to Jambi City. I had made an agreement with the Orang Rimba youths at the *Kantor* that they would teach me *Bahasa Rimba* in exchange for English and the Warsi facilitators unwillingly left me 'alone' with the youths at 'the office'. After only one day all food and water was empty and there were no money to buy more. The youths continuously asked me for money to buy food and cigarettes. I wanted them to like me, but I also wanted to see how they usually dealt, without my presence and means. We went a few days without food.

When I asked why money was a problem, the youths told me that Warsi was supposed to give them money for food, but that they never did. In my experience this was not entirely true. Usually Warsi left some money for food in their absence, but it was rarely enough to feed all the youths at the office for more than a day or two. Upon Warsi's return I asked the facilitators what kind of agreement they had with food and the 'house keeping youths' at the office. Warsi confirmed that the agreement was that the youths would 'run' and maintain the *Kantor* in exchange for food. Some of the facilitators however, expressed reluctance towards giving the youths money because they 'did not work': "*mereka malas, tidak mau kerja, saya tidak mau kasih uang*" (they are lazy, don't want to work, I don't want to give them money).

Over the months I spent in and out of the *Kantor* and the jungle, I became a confidential forum of complaint both for my Orang Rimba friends and my Warsi friends. Warsi staff complained that Orang Rimba – both the youths and those 'inside' (the forest) – were lazy and unwilling to work. Orang Rimba complained that Warsi never paid them the promised salary. This discouraged them from doing as Warsi asked. They also

complained that Warsi staff was lazy and that they did not do their job or make any positive difference in Orang Rimba lives.

From an outsider's perspective, this does not encourage mutual trust. I documented both Warsi's and Orang Rimba's frustration. Warsi did not hold their promises of salary to the youths in the office. They never gave them enough money for food when they left the office, and as I became a regular interior, the 'good' food, fun, and activities I experienced the two first weeks was limited to plain Indo mi (instant noodles) and rice. Some facilitators, almost completely isolated themselves from Orang Rimba by staying in their room all day reading books and sleeping. Many of the youths at the office and Orang Rimba inside the jungle were unwilling to guide Warsi staff when they were entering the jungle, join them in meetings and activities, and constantly complained about Warsi's lack of performance. "*U'rang Rimba kito anjing warsi*" (Orang Rimba, we are Warsi's dogs) one of my friends told me one night by the fire, implying that they were the slaves of Warsi, rewarded with nothing but plain rice.

With the will to improve

Did what I experienced as laziness from Warsi entail Orang Rimba laziness, or did Orang Rimba become lazy because Warsi did not meet their expectations? And where does Warsi appear as heroes in all this? Either way Warsi obviously had a problem communicating with Orang Rimba and whoever started the circle of bad collaboration, there clearly are many improvements to be made in order to successfully reach their mutual goal of protecting the remaining forest inside Bukit Duabelas National Park.

From my experience Warsi did hold what Li (2007) calls 'the will to improve' which gave them a heroic feeling. During my stay Warsi did enter to survey Orang Rimba demography and settlements. They worked with development projects in the buffer zone villagers, met with local government and arranged social gatherings. They also helped foreigners, researchers nature lovers and film teams entering the forest, and not the least; they helped me a lot in the process of getting access to Orang Rimba. But as Li (2007) points out, the willingness to improve does not entail success when the communication between improvers and improved is lacking.

3

Adat – an encompassing concept

Matrilineality and Social organisation

In this chapter I will introduce you to the Orang Rimba concept of *adat*. I will start by introducing you to *adat* as law before I give an example of an *adat* custom illustrated with *melanggun* that involves many aspects of the social system. I will show how *adat* regulates kinship, cosmology, and social organisation. Especially the importance of women and separation is central in the understanding of Orang Rimba *adat* and their perception of the word. I will thus illustrate that *adat* to Orang Rimba is an encompassing concept and that the significance of *adat* is vital for Orang Rimba existence as a significant group.

When I met with some representatives from Warsi in Jambi city before I went to Bukit Duabelas the first thing they told me were a warning that Orang Rimba had a strict *adat* system, and that I had to be careful with the many taboos. One of them volunteered to teach me about Orang Rimba *adat*.

The representative taught me that Orang Rimba did not eat any domesticated animals. Orang Rimba believed that they would be cursed if they ate any food of the outside and that it would make them vulnerable to attacks by tigers. He told me that Orang Rimba were uxorilocal and stated that although they are attending public schools now, they are still of a lower order than us (*pastilah masih di bawah kita*). They are still exotic and much more animal-like than us, he repeatedly assured me. These were the things he found important to inform the white foreigner and with this presentation in mind, I arrived in Bukit Duabelas. This was how the Warsi facilitator perceived Orang Rimba *adat*.

An attempt to give a thorough account of Orang Rimba *adat* in a short thesis like this would only be ridiculous as *adat* is a highly complex concept. I will therefore offer a

short presentation of how I perceived Orang Rimba *adat* during the short time I stayed with Orang Rimba. Sager (2008) gives a more in depth interpretation but as Sager himself points out, not even all Orang Rimba know 'all of *adat*'. A reason for this might be explained simply with the sense that *adat* is a fluid concept constantly negotiated and changed for several reasons. Unlike our own law or dominating religions like Islam and Christianity have books to guide and demand certain behaviours, acts or even lifestyles. Orang Rimba *adat* is nowhere written, since they do not have a literate language. Orang Rimba inherit *adat* through oral tradition, myths and observation, and it is supervised and maintained by an *adat* expert called Manko, who is selected democratically by all the members of the group. A Manko is chosen because of his excellent knowledge of *adat* laws, mantras, spells, magic and unique relationship with 'spirits'. Although in principle Manko is not an inherited title, I found that the present Manko focused on passing down everything he knew about *adat* to one of his sons. Several times my Orang Rimba friends stressed that no one teaches *adat*, but that every Orang Rimba simply "*tentu di hati diri*". To "*tentu di hati diri*" (know in own liver) can refer to Signe Howell's (1981, p.139) argument that the liver (*hati*) "is the seat of both what we call "thoughts" and "feelings", and they do not make any conceptual distinction between the two". "We" is here in reference to western thinkers and "they" to the Chewong of Peninsular Malaysia of which Howell did fieldwork.

Howell (1981) claims the concept of 'knowing in the liver' to refer both to the psychological and the physical. The liver is mainly a symbol of the intellectual self and when Orang Rimba claim to learn or know something in their 'liver' they are merely referring to the cosmological world of 'spirits', 'gods', dreams and other dimensions. Although Howell (1981) refers to a very small group of individuals, she later states that this way of thinking about and referring to the liver is present all over Southeast Asia; Orang Rimba of Bukit Duabelas is no exception. Although Orang Rimba was firm in claiming that they did not learn *adat*, but "*tentu di hati diri*", the myths, tales and stories that accidentally included knowledge of *adat* were many. I thus suggest that Orang Rimba, by taking part in everyday activities and observing older family members and friends as they grow up, do learn *adat* more actively than they admit.

The four above and the four below – Adat laws

Except “the four above” and “the four below” *adat* is open for negotiation and constantly changing. This is not to say that ‘the four above’ and ‘the four below’ are static and unchangeable – that would be impossible – but rather that in contrast to other *adat* laws, these are constitutional and believed to be inherited by the first ancestors who Orang Rimba society grew out of: the Minangkabau. ‘The four above’ and ‘the four below’ I thus perceived as the core of Orang Rimba *adat*. It was presented to me as a law that all Orang Rimba must know and respect. As other *adat* rules are negotiable and vague ‘the four above’ are not. No body breaks ‘the four above’, and only myth-like stories can be told about any of the four being disrespected. The only thing I got Orang Rimba to tell me about such events was that they burned the belongings and the house of the violators, and that the offenders had been executed.

*Puchuk undang-undang nang depan*³²

Figure 5. The eight branches of laws

Empat puchuk ke atas

1. *Mencher'ak telur*

2. *Mandi di pepencheran gading*

3. *Melembung delom*

4. *Menikom bumi*

Four above³³

1. Cracking the egg
(Incest with own child)

2. Bathing in the shower of an elephant
(Sibling incest)

3. Dig inside
(Commit adultery)

4. Stabbing the earth.
(Incest with your mother)

Empat puchuk ke bewoh

1. *Luko bepempai*

2. *Upas racun*

3. *Saro bepeningalan*

4. *Siur Bekor*

Four below

1. Stabbing or hurting someone causing
serious injury

2. Poisoning someone

3. Divorce without law

4. Sparkling flame, burning a house

The figure 5 above illustrates the eight branches of law Manko told me to write down as the four above and the four below. In addition he explained that the four laws above also included murder, both of humans and of valuable trees such as durian trees or the *Sialong* tree, which is the nesting tree of honeybees. Sager (2008, p.120) states that making your wife move away from her customary forests or passing your daughters sleeping place also is included in 'the four above'. Conversely, men seemed to care less about the restricted parts of the house by the time I was there. I found that women

³² Please note that the variation among Orang Rimba settlements and groups are significant. Because Orang Rimba do not write down any of their laws the result is continuous change with or without influence from the outside. Both time and place creates variation, something that becomes evident if you see Sagers (2008, p.120) presentation of 'the four above and the four below' that differ from those I was presented with in Kedudung Muda in 2013 (He was in Makekal).

³³ There are four laws which violation is punished with the highest penalty: death. 'The four below' only requires payment in form of cloth varying from two-three pieces to around 500. All individuals of the society closely monitor these laws.

mostly stayed in their customary forests, however. Traditionally the four above were supposed to be punished by death, but when a villager cut down a durian tree during my time in Bukit Duabelas they negotiated with the village authorities to claim the highest punishment of 500 *koin* (sheets of cloth). When I asked about death penalty no one admitted that it had occurred in their life-time, but everyone seemed to respect the laws above more than laws with lower penalties.

In addition to these higher laws, there are a variety of lesser 'laws' or rules that Sager (2008) translates with amendments. I was told that these were *kurang kuat adat* (weaker *adat*) whereas the four above and the four below were *lebih kuat adat* (stronger *adat*). Women on the other hand, had their own *adat* laws: *penati* that guided them towards what to do if they met outsiders, Manko told me. Although women were limited or free from *adat*, they still had taboo foods, paths, tasks and places they should avoid according to *adat*.

The use of *adat* among Orang Rimba can at times be confusing. *Adat* can mean laws, guidelines, restrictions, social organisation, beliefs or 'religion' and cosmology. Sometimes *adat* clearly means laws and my Orang Rimba friends told me that women were excluded from *adat*. The next moment a woman could tell me that she was prohibited from eating a fish or plant because of *adat*. The concept of *adat* is thus not translatable to one concept of the English language such as law, religion, cosmology or regulator of relations. *Adat* is a total phenomenon, which includes all spheres of Orang Rimba life and orientation in the world. *Adat* is a merging concept that not only binds together categories such as kinship or hierarchy – which are concepts that do not even exist in Orang Rimba vocabulary – but constitutes Orang Rimba as a significant people.

«Jengo'n Ke'mai'

*Kito sedih*³⁴»

The first time I entered to Kedudung Muda – the Orang Rimba settlement I was going to spend most my time with – was with two Warsi facilitators and two unmarried Orang Rimba men. A few children joined us as we arrived at the *Sekolah Rimba* ('jungle school'). The 'jungle school' (see figure 6 below) was an old, about-to-fall-hut that was nowadays only used when film teams, nature lovers or the occasional foreigner wanted to enter the jungle and spend a few nights. Unmarried Orang Rimba boys and men who visited close by families also used the hut. Or it functioned as a place you could rest on the way deeper into the jungle. The former jungle school thus had many uses other than its original purpose and this day it was for the foreign researcher (me) to 'see the Orang Rimba settlements'.



Figure 6. Sekolah Rimba (*the Jungle School*)

³⁴ "Don't come here. We are mourning".

We arrived and went straight to the closest camp. After walking through the jungle for some time, we stopped halfway across a clearing and the Warsi facilitator convinced one of the children to shout to the huts on the other side and ask if Temenggung was there. I had not yet learned any *Bahasa Rimba* (jungle language) and I was confused with the many titles and terms they had for age, marital, and family status. The child shouted something in *Bahasa Rimba* that I by experience only can imagine was something like ‘can we come over; we bring a white person and we are looking for Temenggung’. The child and the women at the house exchanged words and as the conversation did not go the way he had expected, the facilitator joined the conversation in his best *Bahasa Rimba*. Without me understanding the conversation, we turned and went back to the jungle school after throwing some bags of biscuits a few meters towards the women. As we walked back the facilitator told me that the wives of the camp had been alone – there were no men present – and that they were too sad to see anyone. He grunted and added that there were months ago since the death and that they should not be mourning anymore.

Melanggun was one of the first *adat* laws I met in my fieldwork. *Melanggun* is the name of the ritual nomadic lifestyle Orang Rimba take in the case where a member of a settlement or camp dies. They pack their most important belongings and move around in the forest usually without forming permanent camps. Today they also move around in the oil palm plantations, as the forest is very limited. The nomadic period varies from a few months to three years depending on the person who died and cause of death. The reasons for moving are both ritual and practical. Being in a place that reminds you of the dead bring sadness and potential illness, it is also a mystical place where bad spirits and energy threatens. *Melanggun* happen frequently as infant and child mortality is very high. Although I knew about other *adat* laws and rules, the *adat* around death would entangle itself as a labyrinth and a web during my whole fieldwork.

Without me realising it at the time, all the *adat* laws, prohibitions and authorities were entailments and constitutions of each other connecting law, religion, kinship and social organisation together in one system of *adat*. It is thus not possible to separate kinship, religion, law and social organisation from each other as they through *adat* are all

connected. This is evident not only in Orang Rimba *adat* but in the concept of *adat* all over Indonesia and the Malay world. As Howell (1994, p.18) claims with the Lio of central Flores, their *adat* “are the basis of their living culture [...]”. Benda-Beckmann (1990) does the same about *adat* law in Minangkabau; Kerlogue (2011) uses *adat* as a matter of course and applies it as an encompassing concept. Smedal (1991, p.113), although not explicitly proves the same with the *Lom* when he justifies kinship and marital patterns with *adat*. Tanner (1982) means *adat* to be custom. All these and many with them are examples of how *adat* appear as an encompassing concept in most places it exists, and they are all concluded in the official concept *Masyarakat adat* (*adat* communities) (Li, 2001), which is commonly used in Indonesia.

When we went to see the Temenggung and his camp, we were not permitted entrance both because there were no men in the camp at that time – we were all men and a foreigner – and because they were sad due to someone’s death. *Adat* tells you not to disturb someone who is mourning, but it also tells you not to be alone with people of the opposite sex. We were not allowed to come closer although the women at the camp were plenty. Another *adat* prohibition is the taboo against foreigners. *Urang nangoi* (literally: white pig person) are known to bring sickness and death, although nowadays the law is much more flexible than what Sandbukt (1984) describes. At the vulnerable time of mourning the tradition of *adat* is strengthened and in this very brief encounter a number of *adat* laws met us: Gender taboos, death and mourning taboos, inside/outside taboos and a general sceptic towards strangers.

The following pages will introduce the importance of separation between ‘the outside’ and the inside, an important aspect of *adat*.

Separation - outside and inside

Alfred Gell (2008, p.273)) argues that:

“where there is a god [spirit] in everything, the need to keep things apart is overwhelming, because only this separation preserves essences, and essence precedes existence”.

Much like Gell's (2008) theory of separation, Orang Rimba have a great set of taboos that requires separation; mostly concerning women, but also food, plants, and animals, places and humans. Before looking into this internal concept of separation, this section will briefly introduce you to the more fundamental concept of separation: that between the outside and the inside.

I early noted that in everyday-conversation, Orang Rimba used the words exiting/entering (*masuk/keluar*), inside/outside (*delom/luor*) us/people of the outside (*kito/urang luor*) to specify situations, locations and events. At first, I did not reflect much upon the extended use of these concepts. It felt natural as we were living in-between the inside and the outside of the jungle and national park. However, I would soon learn that these were fundamental to Orang Rimba self-identification.

Howell (1996, p.141) argue that "Chewong do not make categorical distinctions of the order nature-culture or mind-body, they nevertheless differentiate between 'us' and 'them'". Equally I suggest that to Orang Rimba the separation is not so much between humans and nonhumans as between 'us' and 'them', 'inside' and 'outside' – us people inside, them people outside. As portrayed by Sandbukt (1984) and Sager (2008) Orang Rimba strongly define themselves in contrast to "outsiders" (*urang luor*). People of the outside (*urang luor*), and the world of the outside (*luor*), represent the opposite of people of the inside (*urang delom*), and the world of the inside (*delom*). Traditionally, Orang Rimba should have no or very limited contact with the outside (*luor*) (Sager, 2008; Sandbukt, 1984, 2000).

The system of Temenggung functioned to keep Orang Rimba isolated from the sickness, death and danger of the outside (Sager, 2008). The Temenggung is a selected individual from each extended matrigrpoup whom are responsible for all contact, negotiation and trade with the outside. According to Sandbukt (2000), Orang Rimba used to not even meet villagers to trade with them. Rather they performed so-called "silent trade" implying that they had fixed locations in the forest where Orang Rimba simply left their trade and picked up the exchanged goods after the villager had left. The strong

separation from 'the outside' was thus an important part of Orang Rimba identity. In 2013 things were very different from what Sandbukt told me in conversation, about them 'fleeing like crazy' when they saw him, or Sager's (2008) stories of the past when Orang Rimba only rarely met with the outside. When I arrived in Bukit Duabelas, Most Orang Rimba had weekly if not daily contact with 'the outside'. Most Orang Rimba men spoke Indonesian and almost everyone ate taboo foods at a daily basis. Despite all the changes, I still got the impression that the concepts of 'inside'/'outside', 'us'/'them' were strong.

The need to define themselves in opposition to others is not unique for Orang Rimba. The peoples are many that have a distinct perception of 'us' and 'them'. Among these are the Chewong of Peninsular Malaysia which Howell (2002) plenty of times have proven to define themselves in contrast to 'the others'. The same accounts for Tonga who separates between the 'tongan manner' and the 'western manner' (Perminow, 2003), and Ramstad (2003) discuss Maori 'ways' as characteristics that separate Maori from the majority, only to mention a few.

I find the description Valeri (2000) offers regarding contagion taboo as pollution to be useful to describe Orang Rimba relationship with the outside. *Urang luor* (outsiders) are not only dangerous because they possibly carry disease and death as a threat to physical health, they are also 'matter out of place'. In *Purity and Danger* (1966), Mary Douglas suggests that things of matter become dirt or anomalies when they appear somewhere they normally would not appear. In Orang Rimba lifeworld people of the outside belong on the outside and when they cross the boundary and enter the forest they become dirt, pollutant and therefore dangerous. Although today Orang Rimba are more on the outside than villagers are on the outside, I suggest that their internalised reference to outsiders as 'illness' is grounded in the same concepts as Douglas (1966) discuss.

Spirits and animism - Adat as 'religion'

As illustrated above, the concept of separation is strong within Orang Rimba. Separation is thus not just between the inside and the outside, but important to Orang Rimba is also the worlds of what Gell (2008) calls 'spirit'.

Orang Rimba believe that *huluy* posses everything alternatively everything posses *huluy* (Sager, 2008). Although Sager (2008) translates *huluy* with 'spirit' and claims it to be a spiritual essence that is present in all the entities of both heaven and earth, I agree with Gellner (2003 in Remme, 2012) and Remme (2012) that concepts like 'gods' and 'spirits' may have different forms, functions and practices in different societies, contexts and to different individuals. Hence, one should be careful in the attempt to translate concepts like *huluy* with western concepts. I therefore seek to explain the concept of Orang Rimba animism without placing too much effort into trying to translate local concepts such as *huluy*. The use of the word 'spirit' is thus only for convenience and is not a direct translation of Orang Rimba's own concepts. Remme (2012) remarks that spirits are often associated with a divide between 'material' and 'immaterial' whereas among Ifugao (and Orang Rimba) a divide cannot that easily be made because of the existence of different forms of materiality (Remme 2012, p.88).

Like Remme (2012, p.76) argue that what Ifugao call *bã'l* are unstable entities that continuously switch between two ways to exist, and that they in everyday life exist only as a potential, I propose that Orang Rimba concepts of *huluy*, *behelo*, *dewo* and different kinds of *hantu* exist much in the same way. These 'spirits' (*huluy*), 'gods' (*behelo*) 'ghosts' (*hantu*), or anyway you might translate them, are potential in all materials, places and spaces of the landscape and the environment.

I learned about actuality and potentiality through stories of animal and plant communities, the existence of different worlds and Orang Rimba's interaction with them through dreams, prayers and mantras. By observing and taking part in everyday activities, I learned how the 'spirits' of the forest play a part in everyday activities such as hunting, gathering or crossing dangerous areas of the forest. Like Laura Ogden (2011, p.79) acknowledges how "nonhuman forms of life, both real and imaginary [...]" move,

form, and interfere with the landscape and the people in the landscape, I experienced how Orang Rimba took precautions and acted according to their perceptions of the 'spirits' and characters of plants and animals. They acted according to knowledge and experience, dreams and myths: what Howell (2012, p.136) calls "cosmo-rules".

Orang Rimba act in the forest according to the 'potentiality of the potentials'. The way Orang Rimba behave in the environment can similarly be compared with what the actualisation of potentials that Remme (2012, 2013) proves to be central for Ifugao animism or what Scott (2007) calls 'onto-praxis', where 'onto-praxis' is:

"[...] the organization of praxis as the situational engagement of social agents with ontological categories – even to the point of sometimes transforming the terms of the deepest stratum of ontology." And further "it encompasses the mutually transforming relationships, not only between myth and history, but also between the received and internalized dispositions, or practice-generative schemes, of a given socio-cultural context and people's everyday activities therein" (Scott, 2007, p.20).

Onto-praxis is the practices a people have that define their ontology (Scott, 2007). For example, Orang Rimba would know where and what to hunt through messages they receive from the 'spirits' of the forest in dreams at night. Likewise they would know where to find medical plants because the 'spirits' of the plant would tell them where to find them – also through dreams. Orang Rimba told me that meeting a porcupine in your garden in a dream meant that you could expect a good hunt the following day. Dreaming that someone cut a tree in your garden was a warning that you should not hunt the following day, and dreaming of rotten fish was the 'spirits' way of warning you of betrayal.

By learning and seeing how Orang Rimba behave according to the perception of the forest as animated, respecting the messages sent by 'spirits' and 'gods', I find that Sager's (2008) proposal that spirit are in everything was still present among Orang Rimba in 2013. Note however that my initial perception that "spirit is in everything in the forest" was equal to "respecting everything in the forest" was rather narrow minded of me. Orang Rimba taught me that connecting with the 'spirits' and respecting

messages from the 'gods', following *adat* rules and taboos guided the way they acted in the landscape. This does not necessarily mean that they avoid breaking a branch or cutting a tree if it is in their way.

The following pages will illustrate *adat* as religion and the importance the 'onto-praxis' have to Orang Rimba. I start with an excerpt about religion from my field notes.

While drinking tea, tonight Nusen told me that he had been a Muslim from 2006-2012 because he had a life on the outside. But it had turned out to be too much work as Islam had a lot of rules and he had to pray five times a day, so he had returned to life as Orang Rimba. He confirmed that he wanted a life inside the jungle again. When I asked why he had converted to Islam in the first place, he told me that it was because most 'urang luor' (people of the outside) were Muslims. Further, he explained that to have a life 'di delom' (inside), he had to have 'agama Orang Rimba' (Orang Rimba religion), and he had that now and only it, whilst when he was a Muslim he had both. He emphasised that you cannot live 'di delom' (inside) without Orang Rimba agama (religion). (Excerpt from field notes, March 2013).

Having the Orang Rimba 'religion' – or *adat* – is vital for survival inside the jungle, but not outside. Over time I learned that practicing the 'religion' of the inside was what made life in the jungle possible. By respecting and following *adat* you could expect a safe and good life inside. By not respecting or following *adat*, life inside would be hard, and even dangerous.

As the reader might discover, I am mixing the concepts *adat* and religion. This is intentional because I found these two concepts to be inseparable in Orang Rimba society. To the extent one can argue that Orang Rimba have religion (*agama*), I suggest that *adat* is what you could translate it with.³⁵ Orang Rimba constantly used them interchangeably. Although the word *agama* (religion) for sure is a concept Orang Rimba have learned from 'the outside', they frequently used it to describe their practises. In

³⁵ Due to limits in time and space I avoid discussion the concept of 'religion'.

Indonesia however, their reference to the word *agama* as religion, would not be recognised. By the Indonesian government only six religions are recognised and you must register with any of them to have ID documents. The five are Islam, Hindu, Buddhism, Catholic, Protestants and Chinese Confucianism (Bayuni, 2013). Even if Orang Rimba themselves use the word *agama* (Indonesian for religion) to describe their *adat* beliefs, I have to pay attention to the possibility that the choice of words was adjusted to me as an outsider. A more proper word to refer to these 'religious' or 'ritual' practices could be Scott's (2007, p.20) "Onto-Praxis".

Here the practices often understood as ritual by westerners like Sager (2008), Sandbukt (1984, 2000) or myself, you may call ontological practices, or 'onto-praxis'. Orang Rimba interact with the animated world of within they live, and the relationships and practices, the humans and non-humans in this world are all reflections of, and acted upon in relation to their ontology: They are onto-praxises.

One day when I joined a Warsi facilitator and two Orang Rimba youths from the 'office' walking through the jungle. The youths, – Nusen and Melvin – had joined to help Warsi find *benor* (forest produce used for colouring) for later sale. On the way Nusen and Melvin expressed reluctance towards passing a certain area. They told me that someone that used to live there had died. The Warsi facilitator was not ready to accept their unwillingness, and after a rather long discussion he convinced them to pass. As we walked in a half circle to avoid the 'worst' area both Nusen and Melvin cried and sang a song that was a prayer to the gods. The lyrics told the 'gods' to exchange them with the dead, which was a young child, wishing the dead well, and expressing peace and friendliness. For 15 minutes or so the song continued. They repeated the lyrics as we walked through the overgrown path. When I expressed my concern towards the Warsi facilitator that had forced them to do something they were not comfortable with, he assured me that they were just joking when they sang the song.

The event made an impression on me, and weeks later I asked Nusen about it. In

privacy, he told me that places of death were *anker*³⁶. In addition to making him sad, remembering the dead child, the possibility of ghosts (*hantu*) and evil 'spirits' (*setan*, *urang ditanoh*) made it unsafe to walk in such places, especially until the period of *melanggun* had finished. Much like Taylor (1993) describes how Juvaro 'remember to forget' the dead, Orang Rimba must 'forget the dead' by not speaking their name and avoiding places associated with them. At the time when we walked through the area, Nusen and Melvin's group were still *melanggun*. Later I found out that the late person was in close kin with Melvin, who had lost a child of his own at the same time. I asked several times about death rituals, and on several occasions I experienced that we had to take alternative routes due to closeness to either places of death or graves. Orang Rimba perform platform funerals,³⁷ which makes it rather uncomfortable if you stumble over a grave shortly after the death.

One of my close friends, although he never admitted he was a *dukon* (shaman or ritual person) had great knowledge of medical plants, *adat* and mantras. I had on several occasions been told that Orang Rimba are never to tell if they are *dukons*. I also knew that eventually most Orang Rimba become *dukon* as they age and all adults know some magic, mantras, spells and plants. Everybody also have the ability to dream, which is a way of entering other dimensions, but more on that later. Broad knowledge of plants and the mantras belonging to the different situations and activities is connected to 'religion', and a high level of *adat* knowledge means that you are 'religious' or a shaman (*dukon*). As Nusen indicated in the excerpts from my field notes, having Orang Rimba *agama* ('religion') is necessary to survive in the jungle. Those most confident in the jungle without fear of neither tigers nor bears, were often the most 'religious' - with a close and good relationship with the 'spirits'.

Knowing the landscape and knowing the forest means that you could feel safe because it is in the landscape, in the animated forest, that all those who guide you in your life – the deities, 'gods' and 'spirits' – dwell. Temenggung explained to me that Orang Rimba communicate with the 'gods' (*behelo*, *tuhan*, *dewa*, *urang di- merego*, *-kijang*, *-rusa* etc.)

³⁶ *Anker* can be translated as mysterious and possibly dangerous. I found it often connected with spirits, ghosts, death and sometimes *Setan* (Satan). Sager (2008) confirms this in his thesis and so did Sandbukt in conversation.

³⁷ See Sager (2008) for further elaboration of Orang Rimba funerals.

or 'spirits' through their dreams. Dreams are the most important channel to interact with other deities and dimensions, and I often heard my friends saying that feeling sleepy meant that they were meant to dream something important that night. An animated plant or animal was waiting to give them a message of anything from choice of wife to what to hunt for the next day. All the scenarios and places they wandered through in their dreams, had significant meanings that each person knew in their liver (*hati*), Senyemat explained to me. Temenggung confirmed that he had dreamt the names of his grandchildren, and we often analysed each other's dreams over a late night coffee.

One of my deeply *beradat* ('religious' or of strong *adat*) friends practiced strict food taboos where others cared less. One day when I received snake meat from a friend and neighbour, my 'shamanic' friend turned down the offer of the meat. Slightly shocked over his lack of enthusiasm in strong contrast to everybody else, I asked him why he would not have the meat. He avoided answering my question until the next day when I joined him without the company of others. He told me that sometimes he could not eat snake meat, without offering me a further explanation. At last, I accepted his reply, realising that I would never really know.

Weeks later I experienced a similar incident when I had been out fishing alone one day. The fishing trip was rather unsuccessful and I managed to catch only two very small fish. When the men came home from their day of work, I offered them a fish each. Again, my friend rejected my offer of food. He told me to have the fish and I was confused of whether he was trying to be nice to me, or if he just did not trust my cooking. The other man happily had the fish in addition to rice and cassava leaves. Once more, Senyemat explained, when we were alone, that *adat* prohibited him from eating the fish. This time his explanation was that it was *ikan betina* (women's fish). Confused that everyone else seemed to eat all the taboo food, I tried to find out why he always took precautions. It was not until the end of my time in Bukit Duabelas that I realised how Senyemat always seemed to know the answers to people's questions and problems. At some point, he told me that a snake had never bitten him and he had never otherwise been hurt in the jungle. He knew and respected *adat* and '*agama*' (religion) and so he could always feel safe in the jungle, he told me. People not following these rules would have less

contact with the 'spirits' and also have less luck in their 'inside' activities. He explained that the tiger could still hurt him if he or someone in his group broke the agreement they had with the tiger community. The same applied for all animals, plants and creatures in the jungle.

Listening to the messages you get in your dreams, and praying is vital to life inside, Senyemat told me. I heard the same from Bepaknuju who told me that he always asked the 'gods' and 'spirits' for help when he went hunting or looking for forest products – I often heard him referred to as a skilled hunter. Knowing now that Orang Rimba have personal food taboos, this might be the reason why Senyemat refused to eat the snake meat when everybody else were happy to. In conversation with Signe Howell she brought to my attention that Chewong had personal food taboos where they abstained from eating certain foods if they had offended the spirit of the animal or plant the food came from. Orang Rimba have a variety of myths and stories of people who have disrespected warnings or advice from 'spirits' in their dreams for so to be killed or severely hurt as a consequence.

Although I still do not know if Senyemat had offended a 'spirit' or if he was preparing himself for a task where he highly needed the support of the *ulo sawo* (python) 'spirit', there was no doubt that his taboos were personal. Activities like getting honey are impossible without knowing the right mantras and having a good relationship with the gods. It is very dangerous to climb 15-30 meters up a tree to get the honey, not to speak of the stings by the bees. I was told that there were only very few individuals who could fetch honey in Kedudung Muda as many were not 'religious' enough anymore – they did not have the knowledge or good relationship with the protective 'spirits' of the forests. They lacked a high level of *adat*.

Achieving Adat - Three main levels

The *adat* laws of Orang Rimba are many and complex and no Orang Rimba know them all. Some are good at *adat* and some are claimed 'not to have it'. Many Orang Rimba told me that not having *adat* was a very bad quality and the group disrespected people lacking it. Saying that people did not have *adat* was used as an invective. Respected

were those who had a high level of *adat* (*dukon*) and you could go to them for advice, medicine or with problems.

After slowly learning about *adat* through trying and failing in participation, asking, and observing, I came to the conclusion that I could divide *adat* into three stages that follows the life cycle³⁸: Childhood, pre-marital and marital *adat* status. This classification fits well with three levels that Temenggung told me about: *Adat tiga: Adil, sehat, mehal*. (Three levels of *adat*: fair, healthy and valuable).

Temenggung explained that persons excused from *adat* are children. Children are almost completely without *adat* simply because they are children and have no authority (*piado atoran*). After reaching what we would call adulthood, you are no longer a child and have some *adat*, but you still do not have obligations or rights. In this stage you have to start learning *adat*, Temenggung explained. Learning *adat* means paying attention to, and respecting the *adat* you see your older kin practice when you are still a child and excused from any responsibility. Through late night storytelling – which was a common activity when I stayed with Orang Rimba – myths and stories are repeated for everybody's amusement, fear, and for the children to learn what to do and what not to do. Malinowski (1926) claim that myths are not symbols but lived realities. I suggest that myths are models for lived realities. The myths and stories function as what Geertz (1973a) calls 'models for'. This means that children and others that listen to and learn the myths and stories use them as examples of how to act and how not to act in situations like those described in the myth.

One example is the story of a man who dreamed that he walked on a certain path and met a sun bear. Instead of trying to kill the bear, he climbed a tree too small for the bear to climb and waited there until the bear gave up and left. The next day the man told his wife about the dream and went on that same path. The wife dreamt that her husband in confrontation with the bear had climbed the tree, but when the bear turned around to leave, her husband climbed down and attacked

³⁸ This division is not necessarily 'real' to Orang Rimba, but is rather a tool for me in the interpretation of their *adat* system. Please note that there are many other 'levels' and stages of *adat* that I will not consider more deeply here.

the bear with his spear from behind. The bear attacked him back and eventually killed him. When the man did not come back in the afternoon, his wife told the other people in the camp about her dream and they went to the area she had dreamt it to be, and found the tree with the scratch-marks and blood on the ground. The bear had killed the man.

The story is a model for others to always respect the warnings you get from the 'spirits'. And when others take 'model of' these stories and act according to their symbolic meaning, these enactments functions as 'models of' the world. I agree with Geertz (1973a, p.95) that: "They [the models for and the models of] both express the world's climate and shape it". – Another example of onto-praxis.

From a man starts smoking around age 8-10 he has to start learning *adat*, Temengging explained. When a man has proven that he respects and 'have' *adat* he can enter into bride wealth, request a marriage and enter the third level of *adat*. This level requires what Temengging called *kebersihan* (cleanness), meaning that you fully have to respect – be clean from sin – *adat*. Waiting too long to marry signalises that you choose not to enter *adat* by staying 'outside the law'. This is commonly perceived as a negative quality.

One of my first and closest friends was around 25 years old and unmarried, something that was highly unusual as most men marry between ages 15-20. He experienced a huge pressure to get married, but he several times expressed to me that he did not feel ready to take responsibility. He wanted to be free (*bebas bejelon*). Being an unmarried adult long past marital age was not good, and three months into my fieldwork he married. When I met him, he was still eating the taboo food of the outside such as chicken, cow and other domesticated animals, he did not partake in meetings and he did not work more than he wanted. As an unmarried man he had no obligations or rights and he liked it. Others though, did not. The only people that could outspokenly disapprove of him were older females, preferably his mother. The choice to ignore her, however was his.

In conversation with Øyvind Sandbukt, he confirmed that Orang Rimba men were 'free' in the 80s too. He told me that it was normal that men spent years on the outside 'trying

out village life'. The pattern was however, then as now, that most men ended up marrying inside the jungle, leading a traditional Orang Rimba life. Sandbukt told me that the current Temenggung, who in 2013 was a fighter for Orang Rimba life inside, had lived years on the outside before marriage – something that explains his broad social network in the Javanese village. Apparently, he had against his will, been forced by his parents to marry inside the jungle; much like my friend in 2013.

Different levels of *adat* are thus achieved as you go through different stages of life – from child, to adolescent, to married and senior. I had both heard from Sandbukt through conversations with him, and read in Sager (2008) that children were included in *adat* in the way that there was a lot of food they were not allowed to eat. I myself witnessed babies going through ceremonies like the bathing ritual³⁹ that take place within the first month after birth. Children thus have *adat* in many ways, but what differs them from the higher levels of *adat* is that they are not punished for any of their actions. When a boy starts smoking, he is no longer excused from *adat* law, and enters the next level of *adat* where he must respect the gender taboos. He is now in the pre-marital phase. To me this was especially clear as to with whom I could share a sleeping space. In the beginning I was constantly confused when I was told that I could sleep together with a child that to me seemed much bigger than the children I had shared a hut with a few days before. I tried to figure out at what age they received *adat*, not knowing that age had nothing to do with it. When I asked why I could sleep in the same space as Muling but not Berituah when Berituah was much smaller than Muling, their parents simply replied that Muling was still *nakal* whilst Berituah was not. *Nakal* can be translated with 'naughty' but I perceived it in this incidence to mean lack of *adat* or authority. Because Muling still did not smoke, he was considered to be without responsibility for the gender taboos. Berituah on the other hand, although younger (smaller) had already started smoking and had to obey the gender laws. When I asked what happened if a boy never started smoking, I was explained that his parents convinced him to have a smoke a few times when crowded just so that people would see that he had entered *adat* – or more correctly was ready to marry.

³⁹ Due to space limitations I will not elaborate further on this ritual. The bathing ritual is the first bath a baby has after it leaves its mother's womb and enters the human world. See Sager (2008, p.357-359).

Some Orang Rimba have their own tobacco in their swidden gardens, but they seemed to always prefer the ready made filtered cigarettes from the outside. Smoking and cigarettes is a highly important reciprocal commodity that is freely exchanged between individuals in social situations. Someone always have cigarettes and they should always be shared. Cigarettes are thus an important element of Orang Rimba sociality.

The next stage of *adat* is reached at marriage and parenthood where a man after marriage, and parenthood is expected to respect *adat* obligations and restrictions fully. He becomes *rer-ayo* (adult) gaining more respect after the birth of his first child. This applies also to Orang Rimba women. Hutchinson (1996, 2000) affirms that this is also the case among the *Nuer*-women who reach adulthood after giving birth to their first child.

As before marriage men are not punished for eating the taboo foods, after marriage and especially after the birth of their first child, they are prohibited from eating domesticated animals. Reading Sandbukt (1984) and even Sager (2008) the prohibitions of taboo (*sumbang*) foods were much stronger then, than during my time with Orang Rimba in 2013. As women are much more important than men through their status as lineage heads, they were in 2013 still closely protected from – the people of and the information of – the outside by their mothers, sisters and brothers.

Women are as Sager (2008) points out, not subjected to the law and do not go through the same stages as men. I argue though, that without it being said, women are subjected to *adat* long before men. Already as children girls are protected from the outside. When women start menstruating – something that is as public as smoking as their Sarong (*kain*) will have bloodstains – their protection increases further. Although they cannot be accused of breaking the gender specific laws of *adat* – because they are always the offended party – women are protected and therefore subjected to *adat* long before men. Men are too unimportant to tend to before they become a potential danger for the women. Further there are certain songs or mantra of which women learn only after reaching the state of marriage. Mya told me of a type of song you learn only after you are married. These songs can be used as protection spells or encouragement before and

during important or dangerous tasks, such as walking thorough *anker* (mystical, potentially dangerous) places. Another type of songs is *Bedidekiron* which can be used by everyone. Mya told me that these songs also had different levels, and that you learn them growing up. They are songs to encourage you during different tasks or when you walk on a path.

The two next sections of this chapter will present⁴⁰ two central practices within *adat* that I find important in order to understand how Orang Rimba perceive the world. These are the practices of kinship, followed by social organisation. Kinship as matrilineal is an aspect of *adat*, and an important one. I will show that the social organisation which is centered around women is tied together in their system of *adat* and an important element of the Orang Rimba identity. These are, as will become evident, overlapping, entwined practices that both constitutes and influence *adat*, vice versa.

Kinship - Gender upside down

”The abject female inferiority prescribed by the *adat* law, then, is highly deceptive. In sum, it almost amounts to a legal fiction, whose primary consequence is that men can be made subject to control by male affines, a control of which women are in fact both the immediate agents and the prime beneficiaries” (Sandbukt, 1988, p.116)

Orang Rimba declare themselves as ancestors of the Minangkabau of West Sumatra. Although the origin myths among Orang Rimba are many, I found that most believed strongly in the *keturunon* Minangkabau (Minangkabau ancestry). Blackwood (2001) claims in her historical review of *adat* law that Dt. Rajo Penghulu⁴¹, a powerful, religious, educated Minangkabau man adjusted Minangkabau *adat* to comply with the

⁴⁰ Due to limitation of both space and time, I will only briefly point out some of the aspects of these complex concepts. For more in dept information I encourage further reading of Sager (2008) and Sandbukt (1984, 2000) which both give thoroughly interpretations. In depth information of kinship and gender is however limited in their publications.

⁴¹ A *Penghulu* is an “educated, urban titled” man, holding administrative positions at the provincial level in Indonesia (Blackwood 2001, p.133).

New Order regime's Islamic writings in the 1960s and 70s. This official recording of Minangkabau *adat* included a 'domestication' of women where men were entitled to all the political power and authority whereas women were left in the home to raise children and cook. I suggest that nearly the opposite has happened in Orang Rimba *adat* system. Blackwood (2001) states that *adat* is a constantly negotiated concept that changes every time the narrative stories of *adat* are told. If this is true, there is no doubt that any *adat* Orang Rimba might have inherited from the Minangkabau has changed just like Minangkabau *adat* has changed. As the Minangkabau *adat* is adjusted to fit with the penetration of Islamic religion, Orang Rimba avoidance of Islam, I suggest, have in fact strengthened the position of women. Being matrilineal, Orang Rimba view it necessary to protect *adat* through women.

Whereas Islam in Minangkabau downplay the strength and capabilities of women and interprets the existing *adat* in a way that make women weak and powerless and in need of protection (Blackwood, 2001, p.140), I suggest that Orang Rimba have taken the protection of women to benefit women and that it has strengthened their role rather than weakening it. Blackwood (2001, p.140) presents the 'weakness' of women as a "reassurance to an imagined audience [...] about men's position in a matrilineal society". Instead of admitting that women have a central role where they control land, houses and lineages Blackwood (2001, p.140) argues that when Dt. Rajo Penghulu wrote down the *adat* laws of Minangkabau, he presented women as weak and in need of protection whereas men were free with greater capabilities. In the next chapter I will show how men's 'freedom' among Orang Rimba are contrary to Minangkabau. Their 'freedom' I suggest is a result of their unimportance, rather than importance. This is not to argue that Orang Rimba are 'sexually egalitarian' in the Leacock et al. sense that they are "separate but equal" (Leacock et al., 1978, p.248). I instead suggest that women are superior among Orang Rimba. Let me illustrate my point by presenting Orang Rimba kinship.

"[...] the natives are matrilineal, and [...] the succession of rank, membership in all the social groups, and the inheritance of possessions descend in the maternal line" (Malinowski, 1984 p.71).

Although Sager (2008:7) claim that Orang Rimba kinship is bilateral⁴², I however suggest that Orang Rimba are matrilineal. Although I agree with Lowie (2004, p.44) that it is impossible to regard any form of kinship as uncompromisingly unilateral. For example both women and men among Orang Rimba take the name of their first child together with the preposition *bepak* for men, and *induk* for women. This implies that there is some sort of connection between child and parent, also for the father. I propose that the reasons to argue that Orang Rimba are matrilineal are plenty. One is the characteristic Lowie (2004, p.43) highlights as a sign of matrilineality: that they all descend from one common ancestor, and the myth that Orang Rimba are ancestors of the Minangkabau who are known for their exclusive matrilineal society (Benda-Beckmann, 1990; Benda-Beckmann & Benda-Beckmann, 2006; Blackwood, 2001; Schrijvers & Postel-Coster, 1977; Tanner, 1982) strengthens the argument. Before even going to the field Warsi told me that Orang Rimba were matrilineal, and this was a common perception among most outsiders I met. While there is no doubt that they are matrilineal, Lowie (2004) points out that it is not unusual that matrilocality produces matrilineality. Using the term matrilineality to ask Orang Rimba if they considered themselves to belong in this category would not be a good method, as they are not familiar with the word matrilineal. Smedal (1991) uses the same argument with the Lom. Their only concept of lineages or clans is *keturunan*, which can be translated with descent. I found that '*keturunon*' (Indonesian *keturunan*) was more or less the only concept Orang Rimba used about descent.

To find the answer to their perception of kinship however, I asked questions of inheritance, kin, and marriage patterns, listened to narrative stories, and observed their practices. Even if they recognise brothers and sisters to be related, this only supports my suggestion that they are matrilineal. According to Malinowski (1927) sisters and brothers of the same mother are regarded as kin in the matrilineal Trobrianders. In fact, Malinowski argues this is their "fundamental principle of kinship" (Malinowski, 1927,p.10). To point out similarities between siblings however, is strictly offensive as all children should resemble their father (Malinowski, 1927 p.88-93). In Orang Rimba

⁴² Bilateral kinship model refers to a system where kinship and inheritance is lead through both male and female line (Keesing & Strathern, 1998; Schneider, 1968; Seymour-Smith, 1986)

society both inheritance and kinship matters are determined matrilineally; hence I argue them to be matrilineal. Besides, why would they care so much to protect women and so little to protect men from the outside if women were not the ones who mattered?

“Their social relations are highly egalitarian, with women having extraordinary rights over forest resources, and extraordinary sharing rights. Their system of law, however, is largely concerned with arranging marriages and regulating proper interactions with females and their rights to forest resources, resulting in some of the most restrictive gender relations in Southeast Asia.” (Sager, 2008, p.1)

Sager (2008) argues how Orang Rimba society is constructed around women's extraordinary rights; simultaneously they are isolated through a system of highly restrictive gender taboos. I learned early that physical contact between men and Orang Rimba women was strictly forbidden outside of marriage, and for a man to meet a woman's eye was a violation of *adat*. Men were thus not allowed to exchange looks or smile at Orang Rimba women without risking a fine. Note however that these rules did not apply from woman to man, but from man to woman. When I questioned why the men could move and act freely, chat, smile and even flirt with women of the outside, the men themselves told me that this was because men did not matter. Whether you describe the gender regulations as restrictive or not, women are important in order to maintain *adat*, men are not. Orang Rimba men were thus not restricted by *adat* to behave in whatever manner they liked with *other* women: It was only Orang Rimba women that *adat* prohibited them from interacting with before marriage. The same applied for men of the outside, something that Sandbukt expressed great frustration over in conversation with me. Even I, a woman, was initially not allowed to interact with Orang Rimba women, unless they had been married long enough and had enough children to have achieved the social status of a man, which Tanner (1982) claims to be much the same in Minangkabau.

Reaching the social status of a man basically meant joining meetings more actively (visibly), sitting together with the men rather than in the back, being free to exit the jungle and shop without the company of men (or older women), and being free to

wander about in the forest alone. Older women were 'freer' than younger women and their freedom was gained with the age. Passing childbearing age made women less important. Thus, instead of arguing that women past childbearing age reached a higher social importance, I suggest that they are less important to the society. They have made their contribution to the society by bearing children and they are no longer vital for the extension of the matriline. This is not to say that they are not of importance, however. Their role is now to guard their younger female kin just like their fellow men. Women of age step out of the backstage-decision maker role of the society, and join the men front-stage⁴³.

We need to protect women for Orang Rimba society to continue, I was repeatedly told. Because descent follows women, it would be catastrophic if women were to marry outside or enter into premarital love affairs. As I throughout my fieldwork achieved an increasing level of trust among Orang Rimba, my network of relations extended from unmarried men, married men, married older women, younger married women and eventually to unmarried women. Both Sandbukt (1984) and Sager (2008) and to some degree Persoon (1989) present Orang Rimba perception of outside intrusion, or the mixing of the outside with the inside to represent the end of the world. Although I never heard Orang Rimba use the expression 'end of the world' to articulate the need to 'protect' women, the *adat* laws concerning women were cautiously adhered to and collectively guarded. Even though I finally felt included and accepted in one of the settlements in Bukit Duabelas, had a network of close female friends of all ages and marital statuses, I up until the last day of exiting the jungle experienced girls hiding in the bushes as they heard me walking down the path.

Women, especially unmarried women, must not be exposed to information from the outside. My dear friend Sing, the oldest of the unmarried daughters in a family, secretly climbed into my house at night to share her concern for married life and ask for 'secret' information of the outside world. Even if we were close friends, we were not allowed to share a sleeping space because I was from 'the outside'. Both she and my other young

⁴³ I will knowingly not go into the whole Goffmanian (1959) discussion of frontstage/backstage although that might be relevant in another discussion of Orang Rimba self-representation.

female friends strongly denied their ability to read or understand Indonesian although they clearly understood some of both. The necessity of keeping women away from the outside was thus a commonly shared concern that everybody worked to preserve. Mothers, sisters and friends looked after each other to make sure nobody was alone with a man, and unmarried girls hid if they heard someone in the forest. This dedication to protecting women from the outside makes the relationship with development organisations very difficult. Although Orang Rimba claim that much have changed since Warsi entered for the first time and that now *adat* is weakened because Warsi's have introduced them to foods and practices that earlier was unthinkable, there is no doubt that the relationship between Warsi and Orang Rimba is one of compromises, but more on that later.

To show how the female line matter I will take the example of Kakok Kerito. Kakok Kerito had been married three times. His first wife died in labour and although he knew a mantra to save her, he had forgotten the right way to say it. If you used the spell wrong you would kill, rather than save your person of interest. After his first wife's death, Kakok Kerito had remarried and after a few years, his second wife suffered the same fate. Although I never became close enough, or dared to ask Kakok Kerito about these happenings directly, they were discussed in secret among others. When I stayed in Bukit Duabelas, Kakok Kerito had already married for the third time and moved to another matri-settlement. Several times he became the late night topic of discussion.

Apparently, Kakok Kerito had attained another reputation. Not for bad magic but rather for disrespecting *adat*. With two late wives, he had children in two matrigrups other than the one he shared with his current wife. His first wife's kin were angry with him for trying to help his children. He gave them money, food and even socialised with them, something he had no right to. His late wife's kin who had custody of the children were angry with him for breaking *adat* by trying to have a relationship with his children.

The only way a father has rights to his child is through his wife. If she dies or divorces him, he no longer has the right to keep a relationship with them. The discussion this night was about how Kakok Kerito had disrespected *adat* by trying to achieve something from his former marriage that he did not have rights to. Although his actions

might be solely actions of love and affection, *adat* prohibits him from having a relationship with them. When I asked why it mattered so much that he helped the children, it was explained to me that children are a great value as they grow up to become workers that brings food and wealth to the family. When women marry, they continue the matriline and bring hardworking men to the group that will help the parents when they get old and weak. Regardless of his past relationship with the group, Kakok Kerito had no rights, and should keep at distance.

The strong affectionate relationship a father has to his children is – if Malinowski (1927) is right – typical of matrilineal societies. “The father is a close companion of his children” (Malinowski 1927, p.13). This however is not to say that he has any power or authority over his children, something Malinowski makes clear. The closeness of the mother through breastfeeding is another aspect that Schneider (1968, 2004) and many with him (Carsten, 1995, 2000, 2004; Lambert, 2000; Middleton, 2000, etc.) use as an argument to why men can feel an extra need to ‘kin’⁴⁴ their children (Howell, 2006).

Although everyone agreed that Kakok Kerito’s intentions were genuine concern and love for his children and that he had no underlying intentions, he did break *adat* law by giving, sharing and caring for his children. Everyone agreed he should stop interfering with matrigroups other than his own (his current wife’s).

In a matrilineal society it is common that a sister’s brother have power and influence in the society, and over her children. Some of the anthropologists that support this statement are Leach (2004), Malinowski (1927, 1984), Parkin (2004), Seymour-Smith (1986), Tanner (1982), and Weiner (1988). Among Orang Rimba however, I did not find this to be the case. Although sisters and brothers have a close relationship as they grow up, when the brothers marry, the uxorilocal residence pattern makes these relationships hard to maintain. In the case where the brother marry near the settlement

⁴⁴ ‘Kinning’ is the concept Howell (2006) use to illustrate how adoptive families have certain practices that they perform in order to create family bonds with their adoptive children. The concept of ‘sharing substance’ such as food, milk, blood and other bodily substance to become family is another concept broadly recognised (Carsten, 1995; Lambert, 2000; Schneider, 1968; Weismantel, 1995 to mention a few). Due to limitation of space I choose not to discuss this further here.

or camp of his sister, he might keep a close affectionate relationship with his sisters, but he has no formal rights or authority to his sisters children or any matter in her matri-camp. As Carsten (1995, p. 223) claims about Langkawi: "It is through living and consuming together" that people become kin. Changing settlement means ending the kin ties and creating new ones with the new group. When a man marries he becomes a member of his wife's matri-settlement and has no 'official' bond to his maternal settlement group.

This is not to deny that brothers care about their sisters or that they have an affectionate relationship just like sisters have with their sisters, father aunts and cousins. My remarks are, however, that brothers have no formal power or '*adat* rights' over their sisters or any decisions in her life. The only thing I witnessed that could be related to the theories of what Richards (1950) called 'matrilineal puzzles⁴⁵' was incidents where sisters sought to brothers for advice in situations where her mother was either dead or not present and she lacked other close female kin to help her solve a problem. Without discussing further the theories of the 'matrilineal puzzles' I find myself to lean towards Watson-Franke (1992) in her criticism of the 'matrilineal puzzle' where she claims that the idea of universal male dominance is a misunderstanding created by western ethnocentrism. More often than sisters asking their brothers for help or guidance, I experienced humble men asking their maternal kin – sisters and mothers – for help with bride price payments or personal advice. Although Orang Rimba may be perceived as relatively egalitarian, I found the oldest women in a settlement to be the holders of authority.

Further, when I asked Orang Rimba how they were related, and if they were related to their fathers they all agreed that the father contributes to the 'making' of the baby when it is in its mother's womb. A few friends confirmed that regular sexual intercourse contributed to feeding or making the baby *jedi* (become). And similarly Weiner (1988) describes the Trobrianders. According to *adat* the father should stay near his wife during pregnancy to make sure the baby '*jedi*'. It happened however, that babies were

⁴⁵ The 'matrilineal puzzle' was brought forth by Audrey Richards (1950) when she suggested that male dominance over women was universal. I will not go deeper into this discussion in this thesis as I have only limited space. To leave the discussion without mention however, would be ignorant as I suggest Orang Rimba to be a case of female dominance.

born without a father present during pregnancy, but that was bad for the baby and I found that people whispered disapprovingly of such situations. Malinowski (1927) uses the word 'moulding' to describe Trobriand practices of the father's contribution in the 'making' of the baby in a matrilineal society: "[...] the husband remains with the woman and the child is moulded." (Malinowski 1927, p.91-92). Further, Knauft (1999, p.32) claims that feeding the foetus with semen is a common practice in most New Guinean societies without mentioning if this practice is related to kinship. Like the Trobrianders, however, Orang Rimba claim that the father's role, according to *adat*, is longer no relevant after the baby is born.

However, all the Orang Rimba fathers I knew showed the same deep care and affection for their children that Malinowski claim the Trobriand fathers have for theirs (1984). I suggest they have what Malinowski (1927) calls 'sociological paternity' where as long as a father socialises with his children and maybe more importantly: their mother, he is perceived as the father of his children. According to *adat* however, father and child are not officially related. Even when father and mother are both alive and within marriage, the father does, like the Trobrianders (Malinowski 1984), not have influential power over his children. Although incidents where the mother or wife expressed anger and yelled at their children or husbands were frequent, I never witnessed a father or husband trying to correct or dominate their wives or children. And neither did I witness any Orang Rimba, male or female directly educate or discipline their children. However, I often witnessed women being upset about their children or husbands behaviour.

If one looks at rules for inheritance, men have no rights whatsoever to his matriline's assets. The only time a man 'inherits' from his mother's kin is when he wants to get married and needs help to pay the bride price, which is usually around 30 pieces of cloths. When I asked one of my friends to describe how inheritance and kin is structured, he explained that kin (Indonesian '*keluarga*') in *Rimba* (the jungle) was determined by '*turunan betina*' which literally means 'female descent'. Hence, inheritance is derived through the female line. In the case where a mother dies, (*pesako*), the saying: "*Mati induk, begenti induk*" (Dead mother, change mother) applies, implying that the children and all the assets of a marriage go to the female kin of the late mother: her sisters and mother. In the case where the father dies or in case of divorce

(*megendo*) all children and assets of the marriage go to the wife. In other words, everything in a marriage belongs to the female part of the marriage, i.e. the wife. Divorce is therefore of disadvantage for the man who is left in the same state as an unmarried adolescent: without rights or particular social value. So far I have discussed the men's role in its child's life. Now I will illustrate that settlement pattern is also women centered.

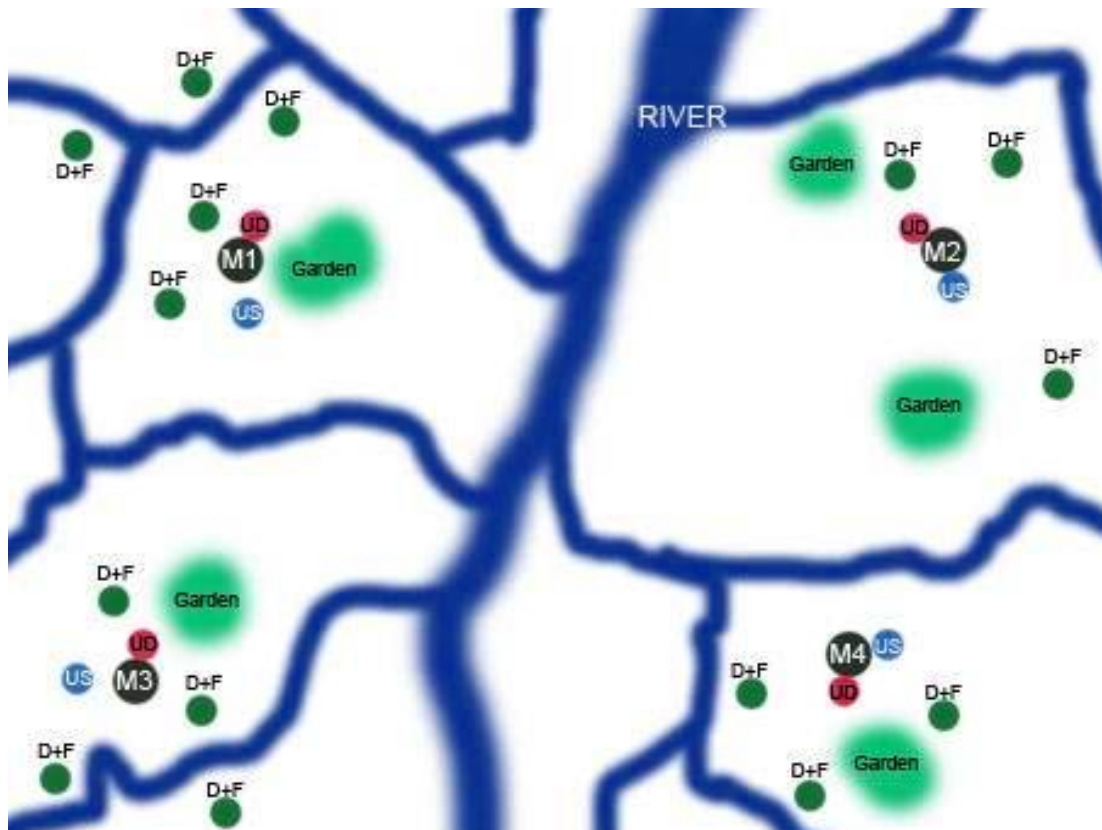


Figure 7. Example of Orang Rimba Settlement pattern (Four camps, one settlement)

M	Mother
D+F	Daughter + family
US	Unmarried sons
UD	Unmarried daughters

The above figure (7) illustrates a typical Orang Rimba settlement pattern where M1 and M2 are sisters who live along the same main river. Around the mother's hut are her daughters and their families' huts, and a hut for the Mother's unmarried children. Each camp thus consists of one woman, her husband, and their daughters with their

husbands and their children. Near each camp are the eldest woman's sisters, their husbands, daughters with husbands and their children. In this way, sisters always stay close and together they make up a settlement. Each mother-group is closely connected and centered around the mother(s). Harmony is important within a camp as they collaborate in finding food, money and new family relations.

Orang Rimba are divided into different matrigrups or settlements which each sprung out of one great ancestor. The Kedudung Muda settlement, that I spent most of my time with, is made up of all the camps along the Kedudung Muda River. Similar to the Bedamini (Sørum, 2003) Orang Rimba name all places after rivers and the extended matrigrup is named after the mother river of the area. Each settlement has one Manko (ritual expert) and one Temenggung and is put together by many camps that are each centered around one head of family couple. When the oldest members of a matri-camp die, the daughters and their families (husband and children) create new camps where they now are the oldest couple, and so it continues through generations.

All the camps within a settlement are thus ancestors of the same mother, which have grown into new branches of matri-camps. The largest segment is the sum of all the settlements along one Mother River where all the smaller connecting rivers – and settlements – are part. Kedudung Muda is part of the Makekal group. It might be confusing that the settlement Kedudung Muda is different from the Makekal settlement. The Makekal settlement is not to be confused with the Makekal group. The settlement by the Makekal River is called the Makekal settlement (*Kelompok Makekal*). This settlement was the first of all the settlements in the Makekal group and those remaining there are distinguished as the Makekal settlement and part of the Makekal group. It is thus important to remember to distinguish between group, settlement, camp and nuclear family, where the group is the largest segment.

Social organisation – Equality and segmentary structures

I have already briefly presented Orang Rimba kinship structure, 'onto-praxis' and laws, which are all tightly connected. To describe Orang Rimba social organisation would thus be a repetition of the already mentioned concepts. *Adat* regulates, constitutes, and is the

sum of 'religion' or 'onto-praxis', kinship, and social organisation as illustrated in the figure 8 below.

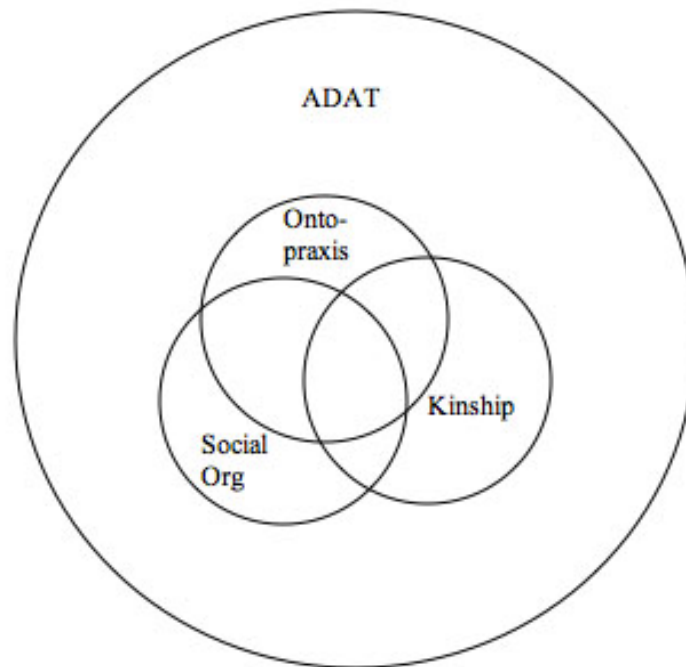


Figure 8. Adat

Orang Rimba society is highly egalitarian. Although they have a system of two 'heads': Temenggung and Manko. According to what I was told neither of the titles are inherited, but they are selected according to their skills and popularity in the group. Being Temenggung however has become an exhausting job, with meetings and negotiations over forestland and development projects the outside keep 'pushing' on Orang Rimba. With the constant pressure of intrusion from villagers, government and large-scale oil palm plantations that want to expand, Temenggung often spend more time on the outside than inside the jungle with his family. The title is thus not very attractive and the current Temenggung was more than ready for someone else to replace him. Manko however expressed that he was happy in his position.

Sager (2008) describes Temenggung as (traditionally) a negotiator and a spokesperson to solve disputes, disagreements, and trade with the outside in order to limit the contact with the outside for the whole tribe. As Warsi told me and I witnessed through my fieldwork, the local, official Indonesian government wanted a leader similar the village

chiefs and delegated Temenggung this role. For the outside society he was thus viewed as the leader of Orang Rimba society, whereas from the inside, his power was not fully recognised.

Manko, as responsible for *adat* was broadly recognised, and he gladly showed me a book his son had made in an attempt to write down *adat* laws. He taught me about the “four above” and the “four below” as the most important laws. During my fieldwork, I recognised that Manko had to be present in discussions and meetings regarding *adat* law. He would have the expertise to know the correct punishment or fine in the case of a violation. Other than his expertise, I did not get the impression that he had more authority than anyone else. Orang Rimba are thus highly egalitarian and all decisions that could affect the larger community – big or small – were lengthy discussed in meetings that could last for days and nights. Their segmented settlement pattern however, holds similarities with what Evans-Pritchard (1940) defines as segmentary structures.

As Evans-Pritchard (1940, p.36) describes the Nuer as “split into segments”, Orang Rimba are also divided into different groups. According to Benjamin (2002), Durkheim defined segments as “social formations consisting of local or regional segments that are not integrated into any higher-level unity” (Durkheim in Benjamin, 2002, p.13). He stresses that of the different segments there is not one segment that controls the other, something that fits well with Orang Rimba social organisation. I several times witnessed the segmented groups varying according to situation. Although Orang Rimba are not territorial like the Nuer, they work together and protect each other around the lineage, the smallest segment being the nuclear family. Orang Rimba show strong loyalty to the segmented group in case of opposition between parts. As will be elaborated in the next chapter, the people of the Kedudung Muda settlement loyally puts all their segmentary oppositions internally aside to form a coalition and protect each other against another similar segment, namely the Makekal settlement group.

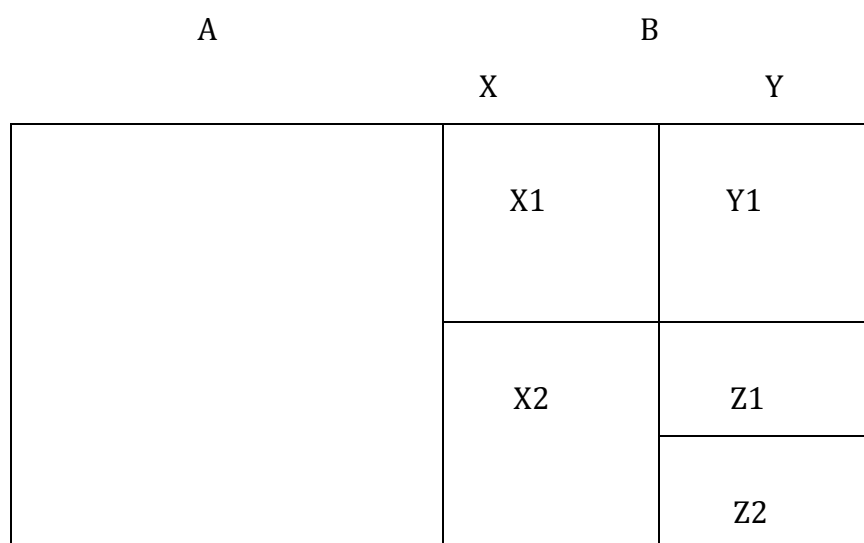


Figure 9. Segmentary structures⁴⁶

To use Evans-Pritchard's model (1940, p37, see figure 9 above), A would be society outside Orang Rimba, whereas B would be Orang Rimba. X would be all the camps making up the Kedudung Muda settlement (M1 and M2) whereas X1 and X2 would be each camp with a mother, husband and their daughters. Z1 and Z2 would be the nuclear families within a matri-camp. During my time in the field, the most common conflicts (except A versus B) were between the X1 and X2 segments, mostly due to disagreements over inheritance and marriages. These were rarely too serious however and I found that they usually were solved without too much conflict. In cases of social crises, different segments go together to form a larger segment and protect common interests.

Returning to Adat – It is adat that binds the society together

The concept of *adat* as an encompassing concept is common all over Indonesia and the Malay world. Turner (1997) shows only one example of such a group in Suku Petalangan. This chapter have among other things shown that through rituals of *melanggun*, inheritance, and restructuring of settlements and organisational segments,

⁴⁶ Reconstructed from Evans-Pritchard (1940, p.37).

death is a social phenomenon that triggers different *adat* practices that refer to all aspects of Orang Rimba society. *Adat* regulates and guides Orang Rimba through different stages, places and activities in life that are highly relevant in order to remain significant as Orang Rimba. Although many aspects of *adat* are decreasingly important to Orang Rimba today, I will in the next chapter like in this, illustrate how gender (women) and boundaries are central to maintain Orang Rimba as a unique group.

4

Ancient knowledge, current problems

“And since they had no system of writing, and therefore no records of their histories, their societies appeared to be frozen, crystalline, and immortal. Wars occurred, people were born and died, but life was seen to move in seasonal cycles and the social guidelines and institutions that we call culture had a fixity that moderns would find difficult to comprehend” (Murphy & Murphy, 1985, p.21).

Murphy and Murphy (1985) presents what they call a “radically altered life style” in the forest people of Cururú River villages of the Amazon that have been “invaded” by “missionary, governmental, and commercial influence” (Murphy & Murphy, 1985, p.26). They contrast these populations with relatively undisturbed savannah populations to see the altered life style of those exposed to outside intrusion. This way of separating between forest people highly affected by outside influences and those less affected can also be seen in Orang Rimba society. As I spent time only with Orang Rimba in Bukit Duabelas, not in the Bukit Tigapuluh area, or among Orang Rimba living permanently on ‘the outside’, the geographical extensiveness where I collected data is small and the findings I present might differ from what you find in other areas. The group I spent most time with is known to have frequent contact with outsiders taking tourists, film teams and researchers into the jungle. At first sight this settlement seem to be strongly connected and influenced by the outside, fitting Murphy and Murphy (1985) concept of a ‘(radically) altered life style’, compared to 20 years ago.

In contrast to how Sandbukt (2000) describes how they practiced ‘silent trade’ with outsiders having only very limited contact with the outside, today most Orang Rimba are in nearly daily contact with outsiders. Although there is no doubt that their lifestyle have changed over the last few decades – from only having salt and tobacco from the

outside, to being dependent on commercial foods – the practises to continue their significant otherness is still present.

In the preceding chapter, I made a brief introduction to Orang Rimba *adat* and the concepts of kinship and social organisation. In this chapter, I will continue by focusing more on the changes and challenges Orang Rimba are facing in a changing environment. I will demonstrate a peaking conflict and portray Orang Rimba orientation in the world through the importance of the environment (of) spirits, separation from ‘the outside’, especially regarding women, and dreams to give an idea of what it means to be Orang Rimba. I propose that Orang Rimba in Bukit Duabelas area are facing a threat against their entire lifeworld with the dilemma of a changing environment and its influences on Orang Rimba *adat*.

Paulsen (2003) describes the Iwam of Papua New Guinea as often suffering from hunger, not because of few resources but rather because they lack effort in gardening combined with extensive food taboos. Gardens are not attended to and often ravaged by floods and wild pigs (Paulsen, 2003, p.31). Although Orang Rimba avoid flooding by locating their gardens in a distance from the river, they too were not eager gardeners and did not tend much to them. *Ubi*⁴⁷ is popular, as it demands minimal care and almost all groups who are not *melanggun* have gardens of mainly *ubi* and chilli trees. Both demand minimal work to maintain. Still, the gardens are subject to vandalism by monkeys and wild pigs; which makes all families I know dependent on supplements of rice purchased on the outside. When I questioned their seemingly little effort and carelessness towards their gardens they always explained to me that they did not bother to put much effort into maintaining a garden as deaths had been frequent lately. The bitterness of leaving a garden one had worked hard to maintain kept them from bothering too much with their gardens in the wait of a death, which would trigger nomadism, leaving their gardens behind.

Both young and old always talked about *duluh* (the past) with nostalgia, telling me how they always could dig for wild yams in the past, when the jungle was wide and lush. One

⁴⁷ *Ubi* is a general term for all edible roots and potatoes such as sweet potatoes, yams and cassava.

could walk for days in thick jungle where tapir, deer, birds and the like were plenty; when *melanggun* they could always dig for wild yams, whereas nowadays game was limited and there was almost no wild yams anymore. In conversation with Øyvind Sandbukt, he could confirm that Orang Rimba life was hard already back in the 80s. Hence, when *duluh* is, I do not know. I suspect that my own cultural expression that everything was better before, without us ever knowing if it in fact was 'better before' might be an expression in Orang Rimba society too.

Warsi staff often described Orang Rimba as a people without a sense of time and without a concept of the value of money. Orang Rimba have what Howell (2011) and Woodburn (1982) call 'immediate return society', implying that they do not aim to save or accumulate their assets, but immediately consume what they gain. In hunter-gather societies and especially in tropical areas, immediate consumption is logical as meat and vegetables would rot within few hours and should be eaten immediately. Although Orang Rimba have a long history of barter with Malay villagers through the system of *jenang*⁴⁸ this is not to say that they hold a 'delayed return' mentality. In my observations of Orang Rimba, trading practices with outsiders did not make them 'planners' or strategic savers. Rather I found this pattern as a reason to argue for them having an immediate return-mentality. They hurried to collect the seasonal fruits, or gather the rubber they had tapped each month, and sold it in the villages. The money they got from selling rubber, chillies, *petoi* (*Parkia speciosa*), durian or other forest and garden products they quickly spent on rice, *indo mi* (instant noodles), and *roti* (crackers and pastry) in the village. In the past, jungle products such as rattan, resin and later rubber were traded through barter with outsiders (Sager, 2008; Sandbukt, 1994, 2000), but today monetary transactions have completely replaced barter. Within a capitalist economy an adjustment to 'delayed return' is beneficial. Most Orang Rimba, I suggest, have not yet adopted a 'delayed return' mindset. Like Woodburn (1982) and Howell (2011) highlights; immediate consumption societies do not mix well with capitalist economy.

⁴⁸ For further elaboration of *jenang*, please see Sandbukt, (1994).

Early in my stay in Bukit Duabelas I was introduced to the problem of Orang Rimba illegally selling forest to villagers. I 'entered' (the jungle) multiple times together with Senang, a Warsi facilitator attempting to map the area and find out who the rubber plantations, vegetable gardens, and the occasional Oil palm field belonged to. This with the hope of getting to the root of the problem of diminishing forest inside the national park; and hopefully find a solution to put an end to it. Senang did not have much success in terms of results and solutions, and eventually he delegated the task to a group of unmarried Orang Rimba men. They walked through all the settlements of Bukit Duabelas national park without the company of foreigners (me), and Warsi staff, and asked of whom the different gardens belonged to. Apparently they were able to find out much more in one 'entering' than Senang had done in many.

"Merego! Ake ketemu merego!"⁴⁹

A bright flow of light hit my face and pulled me out of my sleep. A pocket lamp swiped the surroundings with a sharp, unwelcome brightness in the darkness of night. I sat up, confused by the sudden happening. What did he say? Drunk with sleep it took me a few seconds before I realised what he had just said: Merego (tiger). I looked over to the other side of the house where Senyemat was sitting; clearly upset, scanning the forest with his nightlight. Realising the potential danger with the presence of a tiger, I was struck by a sudden fear and asked him if there really was a tiger here. Clearly upset, he kept repeating "merego, merego!" Did a tiger hunt us? I hurried and turned my torch on and joined the scanning. I kept asking and did not understand what was going on until he patiently explained that Orang Rimba could meet tigers in their dreams.

In his dream, the tiger had come to his house. When a tiger comes to you in a dream, she is there to warn you something bad is about to happen. Normally someone will deceive you, or someone you love. If you listen to the tiger, however, you can escape whatever she is there to warn you about.

⁴⁹ "Tiger, I met a tiger!"

After a while of explaining, I convinced Senyelamat to turn off his light and go back to sleep. Around half an hour later, I heard the sound of laughing children. How could children be out at this hour? It was just past three in the morning and still three hours until sunrise. I looked over to the other side of the house and asked if they heard the voices too. We sat back up without turning on our pocket lamps and agreed that the voices were coming from the path leading out of the jungle. In a few moments, our presumption was confirmed. On the path leading out of the jungle, two lights appeared and together with Nazar, one of the Warsi facilitators, a bunch of children danced down the hill to climb up in our hut. They were there to warn us.

In less than an hour after Senyelamat's meeting with a tiger, we were met by the news that someone was on their way to kill us. Senyelamat was one of five people from the Kedudung Muda matrigrup who had worked actively to map out who the plantations and gardens within the national park belonged to, with the aim to reveal which individuals who illegally sold land to villagers or planted illegal oil palm trees. The survey had revealed that the Orang Rimba settlement along the Makekal River was the group dominating the illegal sale of land. The tension between the Makekal and the Kedudung Muda settlement had peaked when Warsi a few days earlier arranged a demonstration to raise awareness and make the regional government take action against illegal affairs that took place in the national park. Even though the demonstration was cancelled – precisely because of the peaking dispute between the Orang Rimba settlement groups – the anger among those who were labelled as 'the bad guys' had grown over the last few days, and they were ready to revenge their injustice. The news that a group from Makekal was on their way to kill those five who had worked together with Warsi to reveal their illegal actions had reached the Warsi office the same night.

By the mist of dawn, the Warsi-office emerged as we exited the jungle. A group of young men, Senyelamat, Nazar, the children, and me, left our houses in the night; prepared to meet the Makekal with rifles, machetes, knives, metal pipes and everything that could function as a weapon. Excited and tired we waited at the office as more and more people arrived. The news had reached all the camps and

settlements in Kedudung Muda, and young, old, men, women and children from all families continuously arrived throughout the day, prepared for war.

This case is representative of Orang Rimba 'onto-praxis' as descendent from the past and the changes they are facing today. It is an example of the continuity of the past through their ability to dream, and the conflicts of the present and future, which collides with past perspectives on the world. As a representative from the non-human 'spiritual' world: the tiger symbolically and physically protects Orang Rimba who lives in and with *adat* from being destroyed by those Orang Rimba who disrespect *adat*. Selling customary forestland to *urang luor* (villagers) is a serious violation of *adat* as it welcomes people from the 'outside' into the world of Orang Rimba and disrespects the strong and important boundaries between *kito* (us) / *urang luor* (outsiders) and *delom* (inside) / *luor* (outside). Villagers further destroy the potentialities (Remme, 2012, 2013) in the landscape by cutting trees and planting oil palms, changing the environment of which is vital in Orang Rimba lifeworld, cosmology or 'onto-praxis'.

What is outstanding in the above example is that the segmentary groups are formed within a segment that usually should have the same interest in respecting and protecting their *adat*. Why is this so? The political environment is changed. The jungle today is a scarce resource and many Orang Rimba groups and settlements have replaced primary jungle products with well-established rubber plantations. The jungle both inside and outside the boundaries of the national park is rapidly transformed into permanent plantations of one kind or the other, in the place of traditional swidden gardens and a hunter-gather lifestyle. For Orang Rimba who still believe in traditional 'jungle life' where subsistence needs are based on jungle products, the interest in keeping the jungle within Orang Rimba tribe is high priority. Orang Rimba who sell forest to outsiders are a threat to those trying to keep their traditions and life inside the jungle. Action is required to protect themselves against 'the others': Orang Rimba who sell.

Cosmology, multiple worlds and animism

Separation between the 'outside' and the 'inside' is fundamental to Orang Rimba. The examples of minority groups with separation as a primary concept of self-

representation are many. Hoëm (2003) claims that to be the case in Tokelau. Stella (2007) presents it as a result of colonialism introduced by Westerners. Valeri (2000) show how Huaulu apply an extensive use of taboos to among other things separate themselves from 'the other'. According to Edo (2002), Semai origin myths are based on the differentiation between peoples, and their stories of war triggered by an attempt of merging them clearly show the importance of distinction. Lenhart (2002) claim that Orang Suku Laut have a strong separate 'ethnicity' although most of them have already assimilated into major society. Some have gone the other way and Porath (2002, p.101) claim that racism and discrimination have led the Sakais of Riau to start calling themselves *Orang Kampung* (villagers) instead of Sakais in order to avoid stigma. I found that unmarried Orang Rimba men usually worked to look as similar as possible to villagers in an attempt not to be recognised as Orang Rimba when we went to the shops in the village.

Orang Rimba origin stories say the world is divided into seven worlds or realms where different 'potentialities' dwell. Much like Howell (1996) portrays Chewong eight worlds that all represent different realities, Orang Rimba, I was told; believe the world to be divided in much the same way⁵⁰. But where only two or three worlds are relevant on a daily basis. These are 'inside', 'outside', and dream dimensions. Orang Rimba is a jungle people with strong connection to the landscape and all the 'potentialities' of it. Their meaningful relationship with the jungle and everything it contains is not just a matter of food and immediate consumption: It goes way beyond that. They are in a reciprocal system of exchange with the forest and the materials of it, or what Howell (1996, p.142) conceptualises as 'gift economy' where Orang Rimba give and take from the forest. As mentioned in chapter 3, they believe that all materials, or beings in the world (the forest) possess *huluy*. It can have different characteristics and associations depending on the material it inhabits. For example, the tiger has a higher 'essence' than a jungle cat, but they both have *huluy* and must therefore be treated with respect. I will not analyze *huluy* in this thesis due to limited space. For the reader's convenience I will therefore use 'spirits' or 'nonhumans' when I refer to *huluy* or any other varieties of

⁵⁰ As I am not prioritizing a detailed explication of myths I encourage the reader to see Sager (2008) for a more in-depth elaboration of Orang Rimba origin myths.

deities that Orang Rimba communicate with and relate to in their daily practices and in dreams.

Through storytelling about the 'spirits' Orang Rimba actualises – to use Remme's (2012) words – these nonhuman entities and enables the mutual becoming of both humans and nonhumans. Much in thread with Ingold's (2000) theory that the environment is made up of the beings that inhabit, or dwell in it, Orang Rimba do not have a perception of the world as divided into 'nature' and 'culture' but rather view themselves as one of the components of the environment. Because Orang Rimba act in the environment according to its many 'potentialities'⁵¹, it shapes their practices, just as they shape the environment.

Valeri (2000, p.16) write that the Huaulu in their relationship with the forest: "[...] follow its law: hunting and being hunted, killing and being killed". Although Valeri (2000) interprets this to mean that people are against the forest, I suggest that among Orang Rimba, like Howell observed with the Chewong (1994, p. 19) the role as 'hunter and being hunted' is a symbol only of respect for the other components that make out the forest, and by behaving in accordance with the rules, they can survive in the jungle. If they do not follow the law (*adat*) of the forest they will not survive. Instead of seeing it the way Valeri (2000) claim that Huaulu attack and get attacked by the forest, I in contrast experienced that Orang Rimba give and take from the forest in a reciprocal relationship of 'gift economy' (Howell, 1996). As Descola (1996, p.89) puts it: "internal exchanges must be organised so as to return to non-humans the particles of energy which have been diverted from them in the process of food procurement, especially during hunting". This is not to say, however, that the potentiality – of danger – cannot be 'actualised', in the mutual making of humans and the forest.

"Nature is not dead, it was never there in the first place" (Howell, 2014, p.148).

Årheim (1996) describes how Makuna of the Amazon, perceive animals as persons. They believe animals to have their own communities and culture, and that Makuna and

⁵¹ Potentialities here is a reference to Remme's (2012, 2013) idea that nonhumans or 'spirits', or 'gods', as we might call them, have potentiality for actualisation in relation to humans.

the nonhuman 'persons' are in a reciprocal relationship of exchange (Årheim, 1996). This description fits perfectly with Viveiros de Castro's (1998) concept of perspectivism, Descola's (1996, 2009) animism, Howell's (1994) description of Chewong cosmology and maybe even Valeri's (2000) description of Huaulu relationship with the forest. Orang Rimba like many other forest dwellers have a perception of the world as animated. The following paragraphs will illustrate that the concept animism make the forest highly important for Orang Rimba precisely because their animism requires a relationship with 'nature' – the forest.

Viveiros De Castro (1998) states that animism implies a relationship between human and nature – between nature and culture. I have already presented Orang Rimba as a people that do not have such a dichotomous perception of the world. Hence, Orang Rimba do not view themselves as part of nature simply because they have no concept of nature or culture. Instead Orang Rimba divides the world into different realms or dimensions (*halom*) where 'spirits' or what Remme (2012, 2013) calls 'potentialities' dwell in a different world, or realm (*halom*) than that of humans. A sociality between the humans and the nonhumans actualises the nonhumans through a merging of the different worlds (*halom*). The actualisation of nonhuman entities entails adjustment to the environment in relation to these materials. Because of the potential appearance of an actual *hantu* (ghost or dangerous 'spirit') in open clearings in the forest, Orang Rimba behave in accordance with the actuality of these possibly dangerous entities. By acting in relation to these potential beings, Orang Rimba actualises the 'spirits' (Remme, 2013) of the animated forest. Orang Rimba in accordance with Ingold (2000) thus continually 'makes' the world – as they perceive it – through its sociality with the nonhumans in the other realms, through their actualisation of nonhumans. Instead of viewing Ingold's (2000) concept of 'becoming' in contrast to Remme's (2012) concept of actualisation, I further suggest that practices of 'becoming' and 'actualisation' (of the potentialities) can both exist in one place simultaneously.

The 'world' of Orang Rimba (the forest) is changing with the involvement of actors from other worlds (the outside) that enter their world and change it by replacing forest with oil palms. As already mentioned and as Sager (2008, p.141) illustrates, Orang Rimba traditionally perceive the world as divided into several 'worlds' or 'realms' (*halom*). One

world is the world 'outside' with the villages, whereas Orang Rimba *adat* world is 'inside' (the jungle). In addition, the 'spiritual' have a parallel world or dimension of which Orang Rimba enter through dreams to communicate with their 'spirit-guides'⁵² (Howell & Lillegraven 2013). Mixing life inside with life on the outside would rob Orang Rimba of their vital sociability with the nonhuman (Descola, 2006, 2010; Remme, 2013; Viveiros de Castro, 1998, 2004), and their relation with the 'spirits' of the forest will be lost (Sager, 2008.) The existence of plural, separated worlds are thus an important aspect of Orang Rimba cosmology.

For Orang Rimba the consequence of loosing their relationship with their environment – the jungle – is disastrous. I agree with Descola (1996, p.89) "Humans and non-humans are thus substitutes for one another and they contribute jointly, by their reciprocal exchanges, to the equilibrium of the cosmos". Which goes with Ingold's (2000) theory of mutual 'becoming'. If humans and nonhumans do not maintain this reciprocal relationship through a good *adat* practice, Orang Rimba will not only loose their uniqueness as a group, but the protection and guidance from the 'spirit guides' of which they need to survive in the jungle. As portrayed by Sager (2008), sickness, hunger and bad luck will fall upon those defying traditional life and cosmology (*adat*). Abandoning the forest leaves both Orang Rimba and the forest unprotected and both are in danger of decease. Tuck-Po (2002, p.174) claimed the Bateks' to believe that 'The forest cannot survive without the people in it', and equally do Orang Rimba believe so. Further I will illustrate that by the time I visited Bukit Duabelas the prediction was nearly a fact.

Masuk mimpi - Entering dreams

Remme (2013) argue that the idea of "'shared sociality' between human and non-human agents operate as a potential that can be actualized in certain situations" (Remme, 2013, p.3) For Orang Rimba these actualising situations could be dreams.

If animism is understood with Remme (2013, no page) "as a continuity of sociality between humans and non-humans [...]" then dreams certainly play an important role in

⁵² 'Spirit-guide' is the word Howell & Lillegraven (2013, p.281) use to classify Chewong relationship with the nonhuman beings of the forest.

maintaining this 'sociality' among Orang Rimba. Animism among Orang Rimba is characterised by their belief that "humans and nonhumans have the same kind of interiority but are differentiated by the bodies they inhabit" (Remme, 2013). Or as Descola (2009, p. 151) puts it: "[...] humanity as a general condition, not *Homo sapiens* as a species". E.g. the tiger 'god' might have the body of a tiger, but it's characteristics as a 'god' or a 'spirit' is the same as those of humans. Their realms however, are not shared.

Although humans can meet tigers outside of the realm of dreams, it is only through dreams that they can communicate on an equal level with the tiger 'god'. It is only in dreams that both humans and nonhumans have the 'human condition' (Descola, 2009). The tiger always have the potential (Remme, 2012) to act as a 'god' or 'spirit', – or what Viveiros de Castro (1998) might call 'person', or Descola (2009) and Howell (1994, p.17), 'another species of humanity' – but it's potential is only actualised through dreams. According to Viveiros de Castro (1998) and Howell (1986), the nonhuman beings are 'people' in their own realm or dimension. These nonhumans 'potentials' are actualised in dreams or certain liminal situations and practices. Such are death, birth, and illness or when performing especially dangerous tasks e.g. getting honey from the Sialong tree. There are also certain mystical, (*anker*) places in the landscape that can cause actualisation of the nonhumans. These places can be open clearings in the forest or graves. Dreams are yet the most frequent as most Orang Rimba dream almost every night.

Orang Rimba have what Law and Lien (2013) might call a meaningful relationship with the environment. It is through dreams Orang Rimba perceive their 'reality' and through dreams they are connected to everything they interact with, create, and partake in when awake. Orang Rimba whole perception of reality is thus highly contracted around their ability to dream. Unlike Viveiros De Castro (1998) who argues that Shamans are those in contact with the spiritual, all Orang Rimba, like Chewong (Howell, 1994) or Ilahita (Tuzin, 1997) have the ability to dream. Dreaming is one of the essential characteristics that define Orang Rimba and each individual knows the significant meaning of every dream. As Howell (1994) describes the shamanic songs of Chewong as significant to the individual, so are the communications Orang Rimba have with their 'spirit guides' or

nonhuman beings in dreams. Hence, meeting a tiger in a dream has a significant meaning that each individual knows upon encounter. The tiger as a spiritual, cosmological and material being is through your own existence part of all levels of your own spiritual, cosmological and material self. It walks the same paths as you in the landscape, it eats the same game as you, and it guards and protects you, as you guard him from yourself. The tiger is one of the few animals Orang Rimba do not hunt or eat and the mutual respect is mirrored in the perception of the tiger as possessed by 'god', or what Viveiros de Castro (1998) might call animal spirit masters. All activities, animals, plants, trees and places in the jungle that Orang Rimba interact with in their everyday life has significant meaning when they encounter those very same phenomenon in their dreams. The truths of the dreams are never taught but each individual knows its meanings. Simply by being Orang Rimba they know in their own liver. I however, learned them from listening to stories and discussing dreams, and I suspect this might be the way Orang Rimba know the truth of life as well.

Boundaries that matter

"The forest isolates only those who seek to be isolated" (Valeri, 2000, p.9)

In Ingold's (2011) description of how a stone changes its appearance and the way it feels when we touch it if wet, he argues that the stone is changing because of its interaction with its surroundings. There is a relationship "between substance and medium" Ingold (2011, p.32) argues. The forest that Orang Rimba dwell in, is actively changing because of people's practices in it. People partake in the changing of the environment and Orang Rimba change their behaviour according to the changes in the jungle. When a species become extinct Orang Rimba might increase the hunt of other species. When there is no more rattan to gather for trade with villagers, Orang Rimba find new tradable goods or takes other jobs outside the jungle to earn a living. In this way, change in the environment change how Orang Rimba act in it. In return, this leads to new changes in the environment, which affect Orang Rimba and make them look for new possibilities. Here I will focus on how changes in the environment have changed Orang Rimba, more than the other way around.

When Sandbukt visited Orang Rimba for the first time in the 1980s, Orang Rimba would never even think of eating chicken. It was against their *adat*, their orientation in the world as separated between the 'outside' and the 'inside'. The chicken being a domesticated animal of the outside is forbidden by *adat* for Orang Rimba consumption. Today Orang Rimba (men) eat chicken up until marriage, and even that is in negotiation. It is normal that customs change over time, but for Orang Rimba in Bukit Duabelas the rapid change in the physical environment with deforestation and increasing intrusion from 'the outside' might entail changes that effect Orang Rimba as a separated group. However, the challenges Orang Rimba face are hardly unique. The list of minority groups that have been assimilated into mainstream society is endless and the Malay world as a geographical area is one big example. Benjamin (2002) show how all Malays believe they origin from something other than Malay, indicating that entering malayuness (*masuk malayu*) is equal to assimilation or integration from something else, where Islam is viewed as the threshold of assimilation.

What is significant about the change in Orang Rimba society is that their assimilation or disappearance could have consequences beyond their own lifeworld. The Malaysian Bateks might actually be right that the world would collapse without people in the forest (Tuck-Po, 2002, p.174). Given that 'the world' is that of Orang Rimba, namely the forest. In practical terms, Bukit Duabelas correctly exist because of Orang Rimba. The national park was indeed established for Orang Rimba and without the status as a park the area would likely share the same fate as the surrounding areas; which are now nothing but monoculture rubber and oil palm plantations. Orang Rimba also more indirectly are the reason that the forest is still intact. Orang Rimba traditionally live according to the forest and have an interest of protecting it both because it is their home and their source of livelihoods. Sager's (2008) title *The Sky is our Roof, the Earth is our Floor* alone indicates this, but as shown in the previous chapter, it is also because of *adat*.

The disappearance of tropical rainforest and the ecosystem it includes can additionally affect the other worlds 'outside' the jungle, through economic growth, emission of greenhouse gases and the extinction of bees that pollinate a variety of food crops (Raffles, 2010).

Bukit Duabelas is thus a national park established to protect Orang Rimba and their traditional life style. Diminishing tropical rainforests are affecting the carbon emissions globally where the climate discourse prognoses the results to be global warming and climate change (IPCC, 2013). Although Orang Rimba is a small group compared to the human population on the earth, their onto-praxis might be one of the most beneficial for a co-existence of humans and jungles. And the problem of diminishing tropical forest is perceived and treated as both a local and a global problem (see Howell, 2014; Pærregaard, 2014; Tsing, 2005, 2014,). Hence, Orang Rimba adapting to the majority of the Indonesian society could result in the extinction of their significant *adat*, more forest loss, adding to the global climate challenges.

Further Orang Rimba assimilation into major society is not beneficial for them as individuals. Orang Rimba do not have a strong role 'outside', and letting go of their last attachment to their traditional lifeworld will certainly make them the poorest of the poor. They will thus not have a higher standard of living than at the moment, considering their access to subsistence goods like food, clean water, housing or health. In the jungle, they have their own plant medicine, clean drinking water, free access to land and housing materials, generational fruit trees, and game. Outside they are at the bottom of the social ladder as people *belum agama* (without religion).

Taking these factors together there might be reason to argue that Orang Rimba deserve the right to distinguish themselves from mainstream society in an environment that allows for them to keep their traditional livelihoods. They depend on the forest to keep their eminence as Orang Rimba and equally the 'spirits' of the animated forest needs Orang Rimba to mutually exist.

Negotiated boundaries

During my time in Indonesia I was presented with a diversity of explanations of what Orang Rimba are and what you should expect from an Orang Rimba. Being Orang Rimba is not implicit, and there are many different answers to what gives you the right to call yourself Orang Rimba. Who has the right to define what is an Orang Rimba? I suggest

that Orang Rimba are in an in-between-phase where different people – including themselves – define Orang Rimba differently.

In my field notes from 02.03.2013 I wrote:

“A ritual person have many taboos that he cannot violate because in that case he can get possessed by a spirit. A ritual person should not eat specific animals, use soap or perfume etc.”

This passage my friend and key informant Nusen told me a night we were smoking cigarettes (in the lack of anything else to snack on) in the back of ‘the office’. We had been fishing and gathering fruits that day and he felt it was time for me to learn about taboo foods (*Makanon larangon*) and ritual people (*Urang beradat*).

Previously this thesis has presented some of the practices that define Orang Rimba. One of them is the strong distinction between ‘us’ (*kito*) and ‘the outsiders’ (*urang luor*). Here I will show that the characteristics and practices that define Orang Rimba today, is debatable within the Orang Rimba group. Orang Rimba means people of the jungle and indicates that the people living inside the jungle are Orang Rimba. With diminishing jungle many Orang Rimba live outside intact jungle, but their cosmology or perception of the world and *adat* are still in accordance with Orang Rimba tradition. They have the right to call themselves Orang Rimba because they still believe life of Orang Rimba; they still follow *adat* Orang Rimba. They did not choose to live outside the jungle because they desire a life of ‘the outside’ but on the contrary because the *adat* tradition of *melanggun* requires them to take a nomadic lifestyle. With diminishing jungle, they are forced to move outside the boundaries of the physical jungle, but they still inhabit the mental landscape of Orang Rimba cosmology and *adat*.

The boundaries of the jungle in this case are no longer drawn where the jungle ends and the villages or oil palm plantations begin, but are rather perceived by the spiritual and cosmological perception of the world. Living outside the jungle does not make you less an Orang Rimba, but living inside the jungle is not enough to call yourself an Orang Rimba if you do not live according to Orang Rimba perception of the world: *adat*. By

returning to the conflict between the two Orang Rimba groups illustrated earlier in this chapter. Thus, as I see it Makekal are provoking the Kedudung Muda group by disrespecting *adat* and selling customary forest to outsiders. Those I spoke with from the Makekal group however justified their actions by saying that they were only preparing themselves for the future, trying to survive in a changing environment. They have given up the fight against the outside and to some extent adjusted their life to fit the outside by among other things building a permanent stone house financed by sale of forestland, established large rubber plantations which also makes them sedentary as they need to tap rubber every day. My impression though, was that the Makekal were in many ways very traditional. They always took me fishing and hunting at night, they planted animal traps all around their settlement, and they were just as authoritarian on the gender taboos as Kedudung Muda. So where are really the boundaries?

Close to the end of my fieldwork, I had exited the jungle with some friends and we were hanging out at 'the office'. We had a small meeting after a minor conflict with some villagers when a slightly fat man arrived on a motorcycle. I was surprised by the way this villager took over and dominated the conversation by talking louder, in a higher voice than most Orang Rimba, and amused everyone by telling jokes about Orang Rimba that everyone seemed to enjoy. To me, he seemed like the typical villager with the exception that everyone seemed to like him. Usually when a villager talked, my Orang Rimba friends listened and nodded in respect but they rarely laughed at their jokes. Another thing that struck me as confusing was how this man kept saying 'us' when he talked about Orang Rimba matters, although he spoke Indonesian and not a word *Bahasa Rimba*.

After the man left, I asked the others who this annoying man was and they told me that he was an Orang Rimba. To me he both looked and acted like a villager, and the others told me that he had married a village girl and lived in the village for years, and so he had adopted many of the villagers' ways. Besides he had become fat: But he is still Orang Rimba, they assured me.

Confused by how someone so much like a villager could be counted as Orang Rimba, I tried to find out what they meant by saying that he was still Orang Rimba. On later

occasion, one of the older men, a good friend of mine, told me that this man – the Orang Rimba that had married a villager – would always be Orang Rimba to the outside. For the people of the outside, he will, no matter how fat he gets or how loud he speaks always be Orang Rimba, whereas to us, he is not, he said. If he wants to marry inside again and live in the jungle, he is Orang Rimba again my friend assured me.

What my friend had told me was that having Orang Rimba *adat* is what makes you Orang Rimba. Did this mean that outsiders' could be Orang Rimba if they followed Orang Rimba *adat*? I certainly did get comments that I acted as Orang Rimba when I wore *kain* (Sarong) and ate jungle cats – which a Muslim (read: person of the outside⁵³) would never do. But I would be lying if I said that I felt acknowledged as an Orang Rimba by Orang Rimba.

The importance of women has maybe always been the center of *Orang Rimba adat* and cosmology. Women fleeing when they see outsiders (Sandbukt, 1984, 1988) might make it more obvious in the 1980s than today, but seeing the many adjustments already made by the increased influence I still perceive women to be the best perceived value of Orang Rimba society. Reading Effendy (2002), I find that *Petalangan of Riau* have many characteristics in common with Orang Rimba⁵⁴. Orang Rimba have the exact same saying “*Hidup bergantung pado alam, mati bergantung pado asal*” (Effendy, 2002, p.370) where they state that because they are one with nature (the forest), when the forest die, so will the people (Petalangan/Orang Rimba). As Sandbukt argues (1984), I agree that although cosmology changes over time, those with the power to define their world are the ones deciding when Orang Rimba starts and when they end. This is thus saying that when Orang Rimba decide for the world to end by fully assimilate into the ‘outside’, it will indeed end.

Sandbukt (1984, 1988, 2000) claim that Orang Rimba, by avoiding contact with the outside as much as possible, not allowing fundamental matters such as Islam or other religion entering Orang Rimba *adat* and society, have kept them significant. Hence, we

⁵³ To Orang Rimba most people of the outside were Muslims.

⁵⁴ Regarding their geographical closeness they might be of the same origin, but this is not something I will discuss here.

should not undermine the importance of the boundaries between the ‘outside’ (*luor*) and the ‘inside’ (*delom*), ‘us’ (*kito*) Orang Rimba and ‘outsiders’ (*urang luor*). Maybe the reason Orang Rimba have remained a significant group for so long, despite the many predicaments of discontinuance through assimilation into mainstream society (Kamocki, 1979; Persoon, 1989, 1998; Sandbukt, 1984), is because they have, and still do, put a lot of energy into resisting destruction of the boundaries, mainly by keeping women separate. The threat of selling forest is therefore not a trivial problem: it can be existential. Merging the outside (*luor*) with the inside (*delom*) means the end of the world for Orang Rimba. The maintenance of the boundaries between two separate worlds is fundamental to their identity. The evidence of this importance is fundamental in all aspects of Orang Rimba *adat* laws founded in what Sager (2008, p. 1) misunderstands as the ‘[...] most restrictive gender relations in Southeast Asia’: The importance of protecting women is grounded in the importance of separation from the outside. To put it like Turner (1964b, p.46) they have a “[...] tribal⁵⁵ continuity through matriliney”.

⁵⁵ Please note that tribal is here understood as ‘unity’ or group, and should not be associated with past reference to so-called ‘primitiveness’ (Seymour-Smith, 1986, p.281)

5

Die with the forest or live on without it?

Coping with physical changes in the landscape

“Orang Rimba does not get lost in the forest. If we have walked a path once, we will forever know the way.” (Senyelamat, April 2013)

Once we got lost. Adik, Nusen, Koki from Warsi and I were visiting a settlement deep inside the national park. Adik knew the way. He had relatives there and he had lived along the path when he had *belangun*⁵⁶ as a child. The first thing Adik said when we stood on the threshold of the forest, looking over the rubber plantations ahead of us, was that nothing looked like before. We had already walked 30 minutes through an open area where the forest had been cleared. The next 3 hours of the trip featured a stressed Warsi facilitator, a confused Adik, a teasing Nusen and a note-taking anthropologist. The forest had been exchanged with kilometres of rubber plantations where new paths were made in all directions. Several times we had no idea where we were, in the absence of orientation points for Adik to navigate through. Luckily the brooks and rivers were still there, because like the Bedamini of Papua New Guinea (Sørum, 2003, p. 15) it is mainly through rivers Orang Rimba navigate in the landscape.

Since the beginning of the New Order Regime and president Suharto’s agricultural plan, where his goal was for Indonesia to become the world’s largest palm oil producer, oil palm plantations have replaced tropical forests all over Indonesia (McCarthy, 2010). And Sumatra is an Island that has suffered severely from deforestation (IUCN, 1992). Countless reports show that the forests all over Indonesia is diminishing in a concerning speed (Butler 2012; Gaveau, 2012; Greenpeace, 2013; Norad, 2009; WWF, 2014) and have left the local inhabitants of these areas in poverty (IRIN, 2010). The area surrounding Bukit Duabelas national park have gone from jungle to large-scale oil palm and rubber plantations supplied with transmigration villages that have their own small-scale oil palm plantations (McCarthy, 2010; Prasetijo, 2013). According to McCarthy

⁵⁶ *Belangun* is the verb of *melanggun*.

(2010) the Javanese transmigrants are wealthy after the palm oil-boom that more than doubled the prices of palm oil:

“While rubber farmers struggled to afford rice and were selling land just to survive, the previously impoverished Javanese transmigrants in the PIR-Trans schemes were buying motorbikes” (McCarthy, 2010, p.831),

For Orang Rimba who have lost most of the forest they used to live in, and invested in rubber trees in an attempt to survive, the oil palm-boom has left them in extreme poverty (McCarthy, 2010). The unclear land tenure rights in Indonesia make the poor lose their land without being incorporated into the new economy (McCarthy, 2010). According to Orang Rimba in Bukit Duabelas the prices of rubber have decreased from IDR 50.000 per kilo a few years ago, to less than 7000 per kilo when I was there in 2013.

Resilience

Initially this thesis asked how physical changes in the environment had affected Orang Rimba and their perceptions of the world. In the previous chapters I have shown that Orang Rimba view the world as separated between two worlds of ‘us’ Orang Rimba, ‘them’, ‘outsiders’. A third is the ‘spirits’ of the forests. With the *adat* mentality, rituals such as *melanggun* and keeping women separate remains strong. Simultaneously, I have shown that some Orang Rimba have started to look for new ways to survive, including themselves in a world where the forest transforms into commodities, monetary economy and new possibilities in the villages. But still, the majority of Orang Rimba in Bukit Duabelas demonstrate a sense of belonging in the forest that most cannot escape. They express an unwillingness to assimilate into major society.

What Orang Rimba have gone through the last few decades is among other things – deforestation, extensive logging, transmigration settlements, Warsi and the state, where the last instance is REDD. Both Sandbukt (1988, 2000) and Persoon (1989) express surprise that Orang Rimba still resist assimilation. As early as 1915 van Waterschoot van der Gracht predicted that Orang Rimba would “disappear very soon in the process of civilization which will smooth out all differences” (van Waterschoot van der Gracht,

sited in Persoon, 1989, p. 510). Some settlements have taken a sedentary lifestyle and gradually moved from so-called 'tame kubu' and eventually *masuk malayu* (entered Malay) with conversion to Islam (Kamocki, 1979; Prasetyo, 2013; Sandbukt, 2000; Wawrinec, 2010). Orang Rimba in the Bukit Duabelas area however, are in many ways still working to maintain their eminence. These changes and challenges demonstrate resilience. I have shown that Orang Rimba adjust themselves the best they can to the influences from the outside. They recognise the many intruders: NGOs, the state, villagers, and conservation and development project introduced by the above, without giving up their sense of Orang Rimba identity.

This chapter discuss whether there is 'hope' for Orang Rimba to survive as a separate group and possibly how. I will discuss assimilation in general before I reflect on REDD and its potential role in 'saving' Orang Rimba and other forest dwellers in similar situations. I will conclude that in order to succeed in conservation projects such as REDD or Warsi's Orang Rimba-project, it is vital to thoroughly account for the local's perceptions of the world and learn from their theories and practices.

Orang Rimba in the Bukit Duabelas area are generally following *adat* Orang Rimba and they are struggling to keep the worlds apart. The government have made several attempts to assimilate Orang Rimba by building houses for them and submitting them into public school. My observations proved however, that these strategies for assimilating Orang Rimba did not succeed for several reasons. As Persoon pointed out in 1989 (p.516) "The *Melangun* tradition turns every effort to settle them down into a failure." Every time someone dies they leave their houses and take a nomadic lifestyle. Their refusal to let this tradition go makes it impossible for the government to keep them sedentary.

Warsi's initiative to have Orang Rimba enter public school, equally fail when the children only sporadically attend school. My observations were that when the children were bored with school or their parents begged them to come home, they left school and went back to the jungle. I have shown that the result of these processes is that Orang Rimba to 'adapt and adjust' themselves into the changing environments – both physical and political – without completely abandoning their traditional lives.

In-between-ness

Turner (1964a, p.48) claim that beings in the liminal phase “[...] are neither one thing nor another, or may be both ... [they are] ... “betwixt and between” all the recognized fixed points in space-time of structural classification”. If we exclude the ritual and structural aspect there may be grounds to argue that Orang Rimba as a group is in some kind of a liminal phase. Many of the Orang Rimba youths do not know how to hunt, or garden and have forgotten much of *adat*. Orang Rimba traditional lifestyle is changing to become more and more similar to the one of villagers, continuously adapting to the norms and realities of the ‘outside world’. At the same time, Orang Rimba are still recognised as Orang Rimba by the surrounding villagers. Many Orang Rimba, especially younger unmarried men, do not quite fit into their own tribal society. They are “neither here, nor there” (Turner, 1969, p.327), them, nor us. I suggest that over time the influences from the outside are gradually changing the whole Orang Rimba community. When the young men with strong attachments in the village get married with a Rimba girl, they bring many of the habits attained from the outside to inside the jungle, eating taboo foods and dependency on commodities.

Although a large part of Orang Rimba society arguably is “betwixt and between”, to use Turner’s (1964a) term, it is necessary to mention that many of the Orang Rimba would probably not agree to this conclusion. Many still live deep in the jungle and have only limited contact with the outside. Most of the young men marry inside the jungle and exit the ritual liminality that pre-marital status is to men. Still, how deep inside the jungle can you live when the jungle is less than 60.000 hectare? Correctly there are settlements, which have less than weekly contact with the outside, exiting maybe once a month. There are people that do not know how to read, write or count. Although there are settlements that mostly survive on forest products and do not have motorcycles, the speed of today’s expanding oil palm plantations are threatening them to develop similar to the rest of the group.

Unlike the rebirth Turner (1964a, p.49) describes, Orang Rimba are not necessarily reborn into a new world, but alter their old life as they are slowly assimilated into the world of the outside. With both a social, political and material landscape in change, some remain in a liminal phase where they do not have the rights of either world, also

after marriage. When they choose to stay in the houses provided by the government, or take jobs in the oil palm plantations they adjust to life outside. If Turner (1969, p.95) is right that "Liminality is frequently linked to death [...]" the conflict portrayed in the previous chapter, where the Kedudung Muda settlement react against the Makekal is intelligible. Although I suggest that Kedudung Muda are also in a liminal phase. If being in a liminal phase together with the perception that mixing the two worlds of 'inside' and 'outside' – which can be interpreted as liminality – will lead to 'death' of Orang Rimba (Sager 2008), the Kedudung Muda settlement is only right to try to save their kin from demise.

In Kedudung Muda, I experienced that several youths considered, or went through with conversion to Islam. Their reasons were that they wanted to marry in the village. Is conversion to Islam and the attempt to marry a village girl an effort to escape being betwixt between two worlds?

By converting to Islam, Orang Rimba – in theory – achieve the same rights as a villager. But even after conversion my friends could not escape the inconvenient position they were in as landless youths with no assets to offer a new affine relationship. I noticed a pattern where young men who converted to Islam seemed to hurry and marry an Orang Rimba girl shortly after conversion. Many young, unmarried men converted to Islam with the hopes of qualifying for a marriage with a village girl, only to find out that their social status did not increase much and their chances were nearly as small as before conversion. The pressure and eager to marry increased after converting to Islam. The young men expressed a strong need to 'belong', and their ambivalent position as betwixt between two worlds might be the reason why many chose to convert. Although you might view conversion as the threshold to the world 'outside', it did not give them the promised inclusion to the 'outside'. Instead, I found that it functioned as a last step towards the 'outside' before withdrawing to life 'inside'. Of course there are incidents where Orang Rimba men have successfully married a village girl, but I found the pattern to be the opposite.

Signs of slow assimilation

According to Prasetijo (2013) all hope is already out for Orang Rimba. They have to assimilate into the majority of society and let their ethnic uniqueness die. Persoon voices a similar view:

“The Kubu [Orang Rimba] are faced with a choice: either to assimilate completely or to modify their way of hunting and gathering once again and become “high way nomads” and live on aggressive begging” (Persoon, 1989, p.517).

Although there already are settlements of Orang Rimba that have taken to Persoon’s (1989) latter prediction one can only hope he is not right that the only two options for all Orang Rimba in the future is to assimilate completely or become ‘highway nomads’. Maybe Orang Rimba will be able to do what Remme (2012) claims the Ifugao have done successfully: adjust their ontology and ‘make it fit’ into a changing landscape. According to Remme (2012), the Ifugao of Northern Luzon, the Philippines, have successfully negotiated the new Catholic religion to exist in accordance with their animist beliefs, and vice versa.

The animated landscape is still acknowledged and respected alongside new influences within Catholicism and material culture. According to Blackwood (2001) the Minangkabau have done the same.

By contrast Howell and Lillegraven (2013) show that despite the government’s effort to assimilate them by giving them houses and make them sedentary, the Chewong use the houses for some while but at some point they all leave their houses and return to life in the forest. The same pattern has appeared among Orang Rimba. They stay in the houses until someone dies, and then they move. Although unwillingness to settle and assimilate completely has been the pattern among Orang Rimba, they face challenges bigger than Chewong. In the area Orang Rimba live, numbers indicate that the forest in fact can disappear more or less completely. What will happen when there is no more forest to return to? In this case, similar situations in other locations have shown both what Remme (2012) acknowledge with the Ifugao and Persoon predicts will happen with

Orang Rimba: adaptation and adjustment for the former, and 'total assimilation' for the latter.

The slow assimilation of Orang Rimba started long ago, maybe with the introduction of the rubber tree. Rubber trees needs tapping every day and make Orang Rimba more sedentary than before. Orang Rimba still *melanggun* in the case of someone's death, but when I lived with them in 2013, Warsi worked with strategies to make them stop *melanggun* and explained it with deforestation. Warsi facilitators told me that *melanggun* was an extra strain on the forest because Orang Rimba constantly opened new swidden fields when they had to move every time someone died. This is not a sufficient reason to end *melanggun*, however, as Orang Rimba do not open new swidden fields when they are *melanggun*. In the mourning period, Orang Rimba simply move around without permanently settling down in new areas. Instead they return to their already existing gardens when the mourning period ends. When they have lived a few years in one field they might move and open a new area, but this practice is not related to *melanggun*. Whether Warsi is unaware that these practices are unrelated or if they are intentionally using them as excuses, I do not know. Either way, making Orang Rimba leave the *melanggun* tradition is a big step in the process of assimilation.

Another step towards assimilation into the 'outside' (*luor*) is public schools. As previously mentioned, many fathers were unhappy with their children spending weeks at a time away from their families 'inside' (*delom*) when they attended public school 'outside' in the villages, learned *adat* of the outside and forgot their own *adat*.

The RFN and Warsi report from 2009 have as a goal to include women in the 'development' of Orang Rimba. As should already be clear, 'development' of women by integrating them into society of the outside, teaching them numbers, Indonesian, writing, and reading could lead to conditions similar to that of Ilahita Arapesh (Tuzin, 1997). In *The Cassowary's Revenge* Tuzin (1997) gives an example of what happens when a society built up around a secret male cult collapse. When the secrets are revealed, society falls apart. Although I did not learn of a big female secret among Orang Rimba, the importance of keeping women isolated creates sort of a 'mystical'

atmosphere. If Orang Rimba women should be exposed to outside society I do not doubt that Orang Rimba society will fall apart, similar to Ilahita Arapesh (Tuzin, 1997).

Can REDD save Bukit Duabelas and Orang Rimba?

How then, can Orang Rimba continue their existence as a separate group? Warsi claim that their work is focused also on protecting Orang Rimba traditional life. This however cannot be successful with their simultaneous integration into the world of the outside and the many intruders deforesting the land.

Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD) is the initiative by the United Nations (UN) to keep southern countries from cutting forests. REDD was supposed to benefit not only states but also local communities (Angelsen & McNeill, 2012). Orang Rimba and the remaining forest in the areas they dwell are already protected areas. Despite this, one of the main challenges in Bukit Duabelas is deforestation. The constant intrusion of buffer zone villagers and their expanding oil palm plantations are threatening what remains of Orang Rimba habitat. Obviously the governing of the national park is not sufficient to protect the forest. Despite Warsi's attempt to initiate alternative development projects for the buffer zone villages, the forest inside Bukit Duabelas is decreasing (Warsi & RFN, 2009). Some Orang Rimba sell their forestland in what they claim is preparation for *habis rimbanya* (no more forest). When I asked why they had sold their forest they replied that any minute their forestland could be ripped away from them as they had experienced so many times in the past. There was no guarantee that the forest would not be taken away from them tomorrow, in one week, one month, or one year, and so they found it safer to invest in something that actually belonged to them, and cash out the value of the forest before anyone took it, leaving them empty handed.

When I asked about the forest inside the national park, they did not seem to trust that there was anything special about national parks. One day they could hear politicians or park rangers say that Bukit Duabelas belonged to Orang Rimba and that nobody else, not even the government could take it away from them. The next day they were told that if they did not protect their forest the government would take it. Daily they

witnessed villagers entering the national park gathering forest products such as fruit, rattan, firewood and even trees to build themselves houses.

As Orang Rimba is already incorporated in the capitalist economy, the concept of paying for trees might be beneficial to Bukit Duabelas. Could Bukit Duabelas be saved if the buffer zone villages were paid by REDD not to cut the trees? The system that exist today where Warsi work in the villages to create alternative sources of income other than forest products and palm oil is not sufficient. When Orang Rimba sell their forestland new problems occur. The concept where REDD pays people not to cut trees, might not have succeeded many places so far, and implementation is not as easy as it looks on paper (Brockhaus & Angelsen, 2012). Maybe REDD could be a solution for Orang Rimba and Bukit Duabelas? The main problem in Bukit Duabelas is not that Orang Rimba are taking more out of the forest than it produces, but rather that intruders do.

According to Streck & Parker (2012) REDD+ vision is to compensate the people that have suffered from economic loss. Orang Rimba have suffered more than economic loss, not because REDD+ or any other development project have prohibited them from cutting down the forest, but rather because other people, companies and the Indonesian government have cut down trees or contributed to the deforestation of the area where Orang Rimba live. Besides, how can we count for economic loss? Orang Rimba economy is rather small in the global context whereas for Orang Rimba their access to forest is substantial. Could Orang Rimba benefit from REDD+? Could they be rewarded for wanting and trying to keep the forest when no one else would?

The arguments used: that Orang Rimba are destroying the forest when they practice swidden cultivation exist in all levels of the environmental discourse. I heard Warsi facilitators complain that Orang Rimba destroy the forest when they 'slash and burn' and that they wanted them to stop this practice. According to Li (2007, p72) however, swidden cultivation is sustainable. The result was the introduction of the rubber tree, which, for the rainforest might be just as destructive as swidden cultivation, or more. When Orang Rimba open a swidden field it is only because they are leaving an old one. Orang Rimba practice of not going back and open an old swidden field before all evidence that it has ever been opened has disappeared allows for the forest grow back.

Additionally, Orang Rimba do not open a very large area. They open only small gardens of approximately one hectare. After the rubber tree was introduced to Orang Rimba, it has taken over much of the economy, and the forestland. All Orang Rimba families I know have rubber gardens. Instead of opening forestland, cultivating the land for a few years and then leave the area to grow back, rubber trees can be tapped for decades. Hence, instead of letting the forest grow back I experienced that Orang Rimba expanded their already existing rubber plantations opening more forest, not leaving an old area to grow back. Although the rubber trees allow other species of animals and vegetation to grow side-by-side to a further extent than the oil palm, the biodiversity cannot be the same as in 'wild', undomesticated jungle vegetation (see figure 10 below).



Figure 10. Traditional rubber plantation with processing station in Bukit Duabelas National park

Although Orang Rimba traditionally exploit the resources of the forest, I argue they are much more 'sustainable' than the alternative. Could a solution to the problem of deforestation be forest dwellers? Even if Orang Rimba were awarded for their traditional reciprocal life in and with the forest, the other threats are many, large and powerful. Today no REDD-projects are introduced in Bukit Duabelas and implementing REDD+ in a way that could benefit Orang Rimba, villagers, international companies and

the Indonesian government might be an impossible task. Brockhaus & Angelsen (2012) has shown that REDD+ is a good idea in theory but difficult to implement in practice. A problem that might occur in an event where REDD+ were to be implemented in Bukit Duabelas is the element that Brockhaus and Angelsen (2012, p.19) present: What they call “forest dependent people” should be represented either by Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) or “[...] self-declared representatives who act on their behalf in policy arenas”. This problem already exists between Orang Rimba and Warsi, where Warsi – the NGO – speaks on behalf of Orang Rimba – the forest dependent people – without deeper knowledge of Orang Rimba as a cultural group. The misunderstandings and misinterpretations entail a tense relationship where the projects suffer from slow progress and often end up being unsuccessful. Would implementing REDD+ be any different than the current situation with Orang Rimba?

Another challenge is the dilemma pointed out by Brockhaus and Angelsen (2012) that the funding in REDD+ is mainly from development aid in the work against poverty. REDD+ then have to please the donors by reducing poverty while they work to reduce emissions. A problem in this incidence could be the definition of poverty. From a global perspective Orang Rimba traditional lifestyle might occur as poor. Without permanent houses, electricity, water and much of a materialistic culture, the development goals of REDD+ might collide with the alternative perception of poverty in Orang Rimba cultural practice. A forest rich of game, fruit trees and vegetation is wealth for Orang Rimba, whereas international development goals might have different objectives. REDD+ therefore must be adjusted to meet the needs of the specific group, in this case forest dwellers and more specific Orang Rimba. Brockhaus and Angelsen (2012) point out how the billion dollar deal between Norway and Indonesia contained so many compromises that there are speculations whether the agreement actually did contribute to reduction or not.

Further Howell (in Khazaleh, 2014) argues that forest dwellers are potentially the biggest ‘losers’ in a REDD-project as they are ignored or not informed. She also claim that anthropological research is ignored and not wanted by those responsible for REDD in Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad) and The Government of Norway’s International Climate and Forest Initiative (KOS) (Khazaleh, 2014). As shown

in chapter two of this thesis, Warsi's work with Orang Rimba is complicated by cultural differences and poor communication. If Howell is right that REDD often leave forest dwellers unrewarded, the implementation of REDD in Bukit Duabelas would not solve the problems of deforestation. Orang Rimba would still not benefit from their efforts to keep the forest. Whether this is already the situation in Bukit Duabelas is debatable. Orang Rimba themselves might feel that they are the losers in their relationship with Warsi, and in many ways they are.

As I have illustrated in the previous chapters, Orang Rimba have already lost most of their livelihoods with the introduction of oil palms and transmigration villages. On the other hand, they have been granted a reserve for them to freely exploit with only very few restrictions. With the national park, however followed a necessary relationship with Warsi, local governments, park rangers and villagers both to maintain and protect the park from the above, and because the park was not big enough to live simply of the forest's resources. Additionally Warsi expect Orang Rimba to have an education and become 'civilised' and able to deal with the outside world. This makes impossible Orang Rimba tradition of 'isolation' from the 'outside'. Whether it is volunteer integration or involuntary assimilation, Orang Rimba are slowly merging with the outside society. Their traditions, *adat*, lifestyle and significant knowledge of the forest are being exchanged with headphones, motorcycles, commercial commodities and modern medicine. Simultaneously much of the little forestland they have in the national park is either stolen by intruding villagers or some chooses to sell forestland before it is taken. Insecurity around the status of the national park means that Orang Rimba never can trust that the forest they have rights to today, will be there for their disposition tomorrow.

In the occasion of a future without jungle left in Bukit Duabelas, how can Orang Rimba maintain their lives as Orang Rimba? The empirical examples of similar situations however show that without completely assimilating, they maintain their status as Minangkabau, Ifugao, or Bateks keeping some of the key elements of their significance when they blend into major society. However, forest dwellers might have larger difficulty dealing with change when the core of their existence as a significant group - the forest - ceases to exist. Hopefully the question if Orang Rimba (people of the jungle)

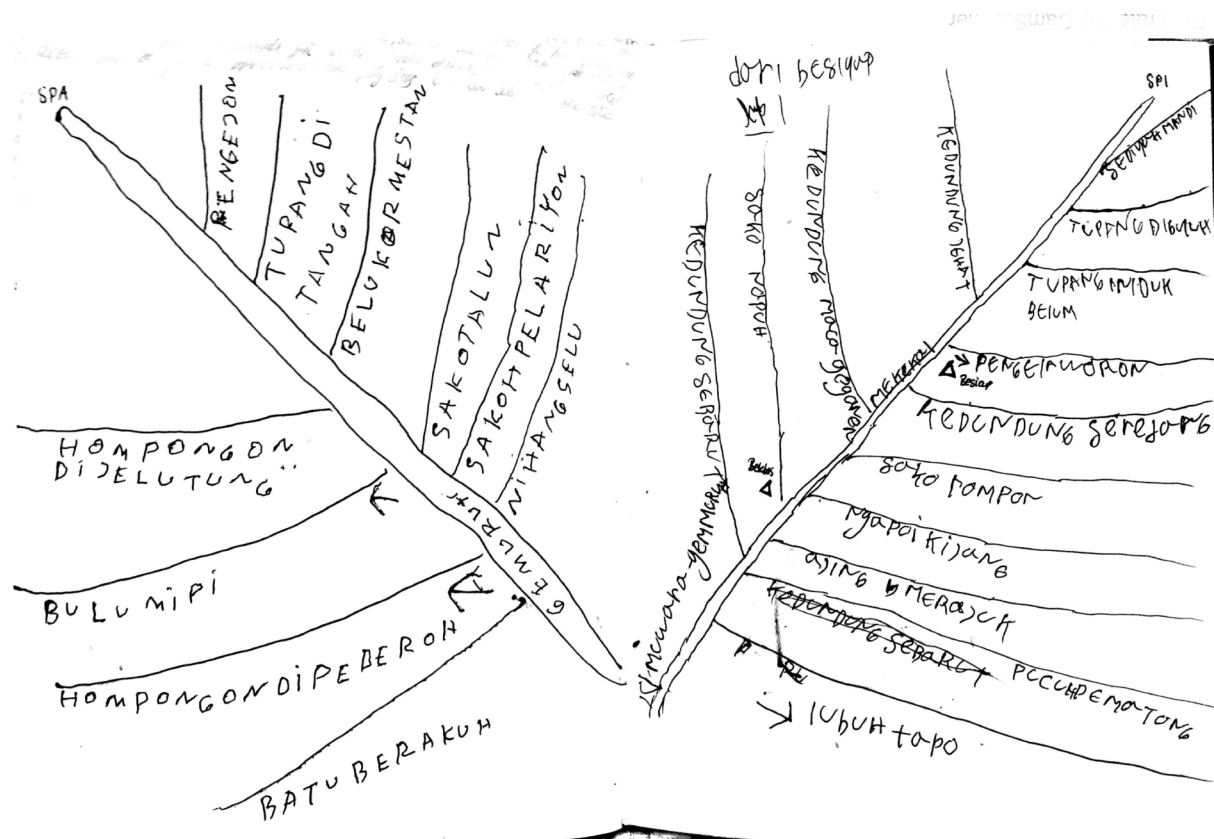
can continue being 'people of the jungle' when there is no more jungle left, needs never be answered.

Further, the insecurity and diminishing forest, assimilation processes and discrimination makes Orang Rimba the 'losers' in a project that was meant to benefit them. As the similarities between REDD-projects and the already existing Warsi-project are many, I suggest that new turns must be made to make these projects benefit the most vulnerable groups: the forest dwellers. If Howell is right that anthropological research is continuously ignored by projects that repeatedly fail to succeed (Khazaleh, 2014), my suggestion for improvement could not be simpler or clearer: Both REDD and Warsi need to consider the results of long-term anthropological fieldwork more closely and take these findings as a starting point and a main component for their development of projects.

I admit that a better solution might be for the locals to speak for themselves without anthropologists as 'middlemen' between them and the government, or NGO's. But as the previous chapters have illustrated, Orang Rimba still demonstrate a wish to remain separated from 'the outside'. How may Orang Rimba remain 'separated' whilst taking part in official matters? Their current system where women supposedly are isolated, and men are responsible for direct communication with 'the outside'; have worked to some extent. But Orang Rimba are represented through the NGO Warsi in a collaboration that signalises need for improvement.

Hence, anthropological research, which focuses on local communities, should be given in all global, national and local conservation projects, including Bukit Duabelas. The forest dwellers must be given a voice. Not just through an NGO or a few individuals with high social status, they should be represented as a group and through their own perspective and perceptions of the world. Geertz (1973b) might be right that we need thick descriptions in order to succeed.

Appendix 1



Map drawn by two informants when I asked them to draw where we had walked the last four days. All lines are rivers with their names. We walked through Bukit Duabelas national park from transmigration village SPI on the right corner to transmigration village SPA on the left corner. To illustrate how Orang Rimba navigate through a system of brooks and rivers.

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